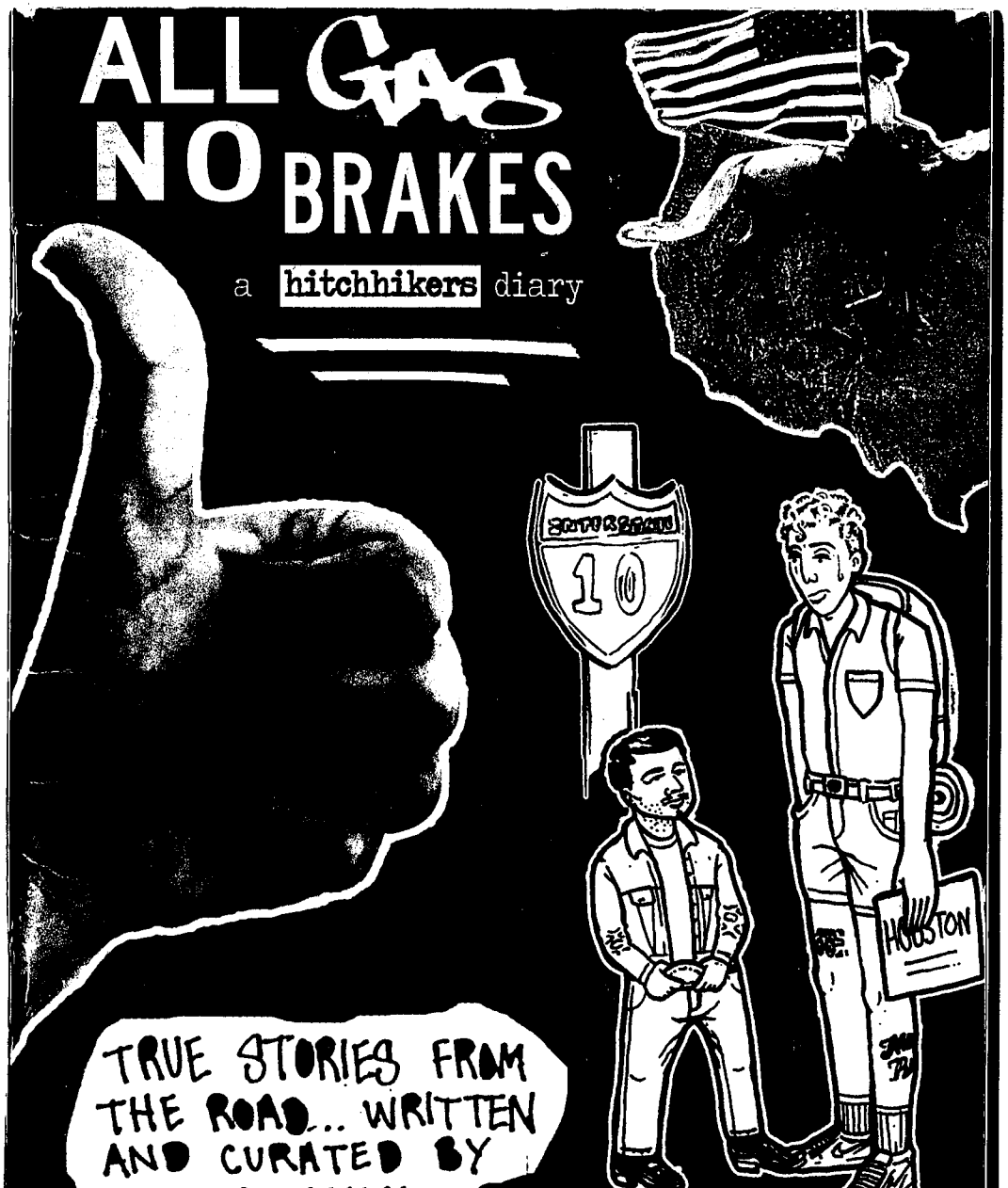
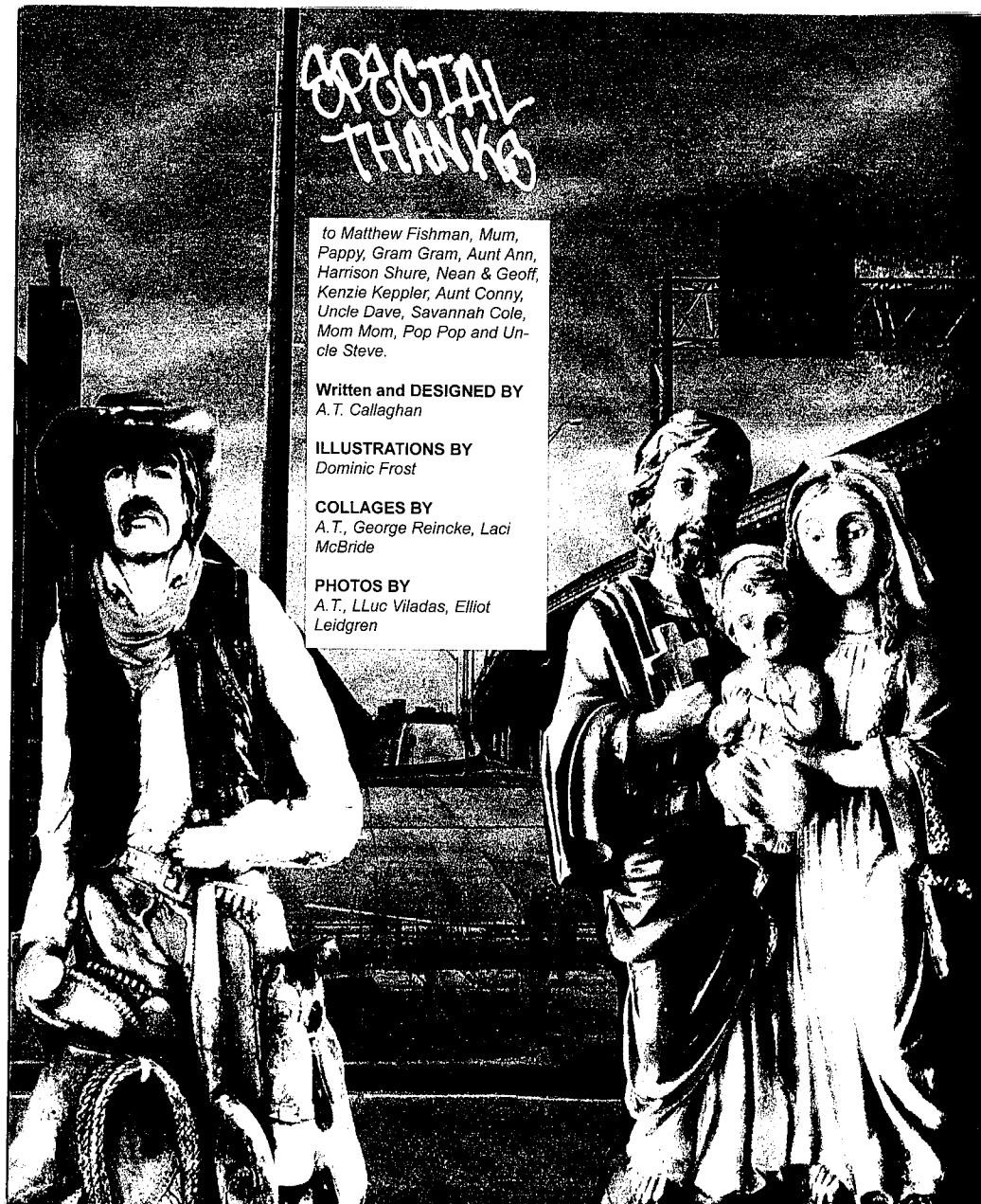

ALL GAS
NO BRAKES
a hitchhikers diary
10
HOUSTON
TRUE STORIES FROM THE ROAD... WRITTEN AND CURATED BY

ALL GAS NO BRAKES

a hitchhikers diary

TRUE STORIES FROM THE ROAD... WRITTEN AND CURATED BY A.T. CALLAGHAN

FIRST EDITION



special thanks

to Matthew Fishman, Mum, Pappy, Gram Gram, Aunt Ann, Harrison Shure, Nean & Geoff, Kenzie Keppler, Aunt Conny, Uncle Dave, Savannah Cole, Mom Mom, Pop Pop and Uncle Steve.

Written and DESIGNED BY
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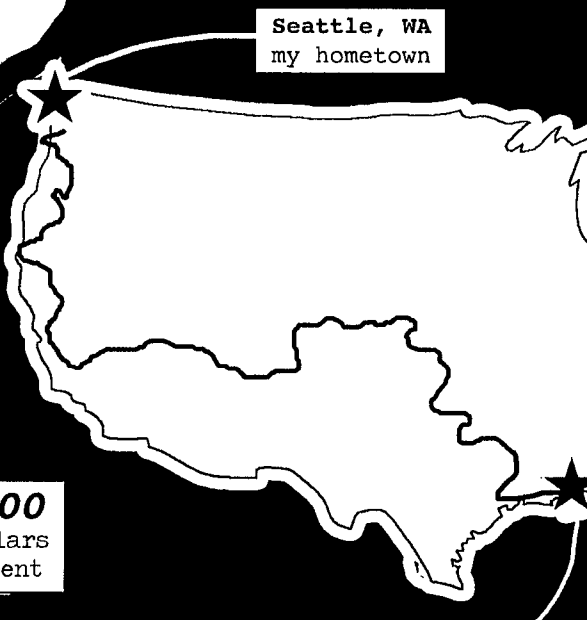
about the author

I am A.T. Callaghan, a journalist from Seattle. Two years ago, I set aside my life and spent seventy days hitchhiking through America -- aimless, alone and nearly dead broke.



the raw data

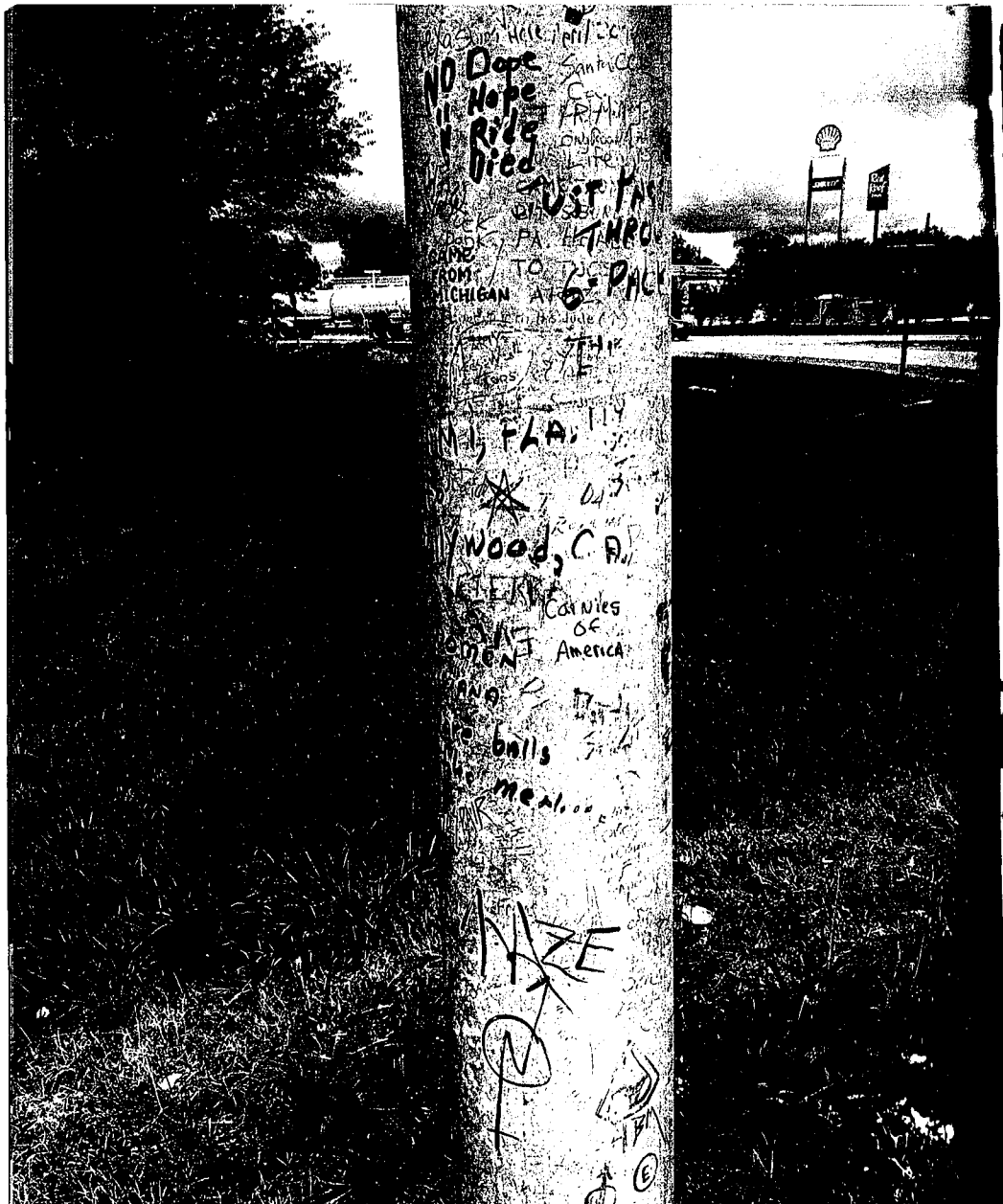
3,358 miles mobbed

178 KIND bars stuffed into gooch region

800-900 conversations

300 dollars spent

76



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FOREWORD

I often ask myself -- does the world need another book about hitchhiking, written by an able-bodied, *devout* Christian man-child who renounces a society that's built for his own success? Probably not, but lets face it: you've already been bamboozled for several dollars and I'm far too erratic to hold a Goldman Sachs internship, so we're in this together. Also— *who are you*? . . this bridges to a deeper question . . who actually cares about *All Gas No Brakes*? This is the first work I've ever published and I'm not sure who its audience will be. Fans of *On the Road* will surely be disappointed. There is zero wanderlust ahead; no poems about unleashing my third eye perched atop the Grand Canyon, or anywhere else for that matter. *Lonely Planet* readers will be bummed, too-- this is not a guidebook. After all, why would I reveal the ingenious schemes that make it possible to travel for free? I still do *this*, and plus; that would put my career in jeopardy. You must have forgotten, I double as a professional journalist-- one with over a hundred connections on *LinkedIn* who cannot be seen by Anderson Cooper as some kind of nomadic bandit.

But in all seriousness, this book is my first attempt to organize and market whatever it is that I have been up to, so thank you. If you feel duped because I'm not going to shower you in travel tips, genuinely ask yourself: how hard are you willing to — *risk it for the biscuit* — so to speak? Are you willing to dress in pajamas to invade hotel breakfasts each morning? Could you keep a straight face while presenting a Krispy Kreme cashier with a doctored coupon that reads '*ALL donuts 90% off*,' while threatening to phone in your 'father's golfing buddy,' *Mr. Kreme*? It takes heaps of charisma and depravity to pull this sort of thing off. That pair of attributes is rare. It's in the bones of rockstars and dictators; cult figures who mobilize society's useless; building armies from people like philosophy majors and horoscope columnists. And though I'm not claiming to have the juice like, say; Sting or Stalin, I am an agent of irrational persuasion and we don't need more of me.

In that vein, there is no coherent plot line to be found in the pages ahead. This is mostly because my hitchhiking experience made no sense — at least, in terms of narrative structure. For seventy days, I abandoned my life and wandered through America completely alone, broke, and without plans for food or shelter. Things were unpredictable. In Oklahoma City, I lived with a surgeon named Daniel and ate filet mignon every night. In Salinas, I slept in a bum camp with an ex-con named Popeye and ate nothing but gas station peanuts for two days. I suppose one thing remained constant though; roadside haggling. Each day I'd wake up at the crack of dawn and fish for strangers; baiting them with small talk, reeling them in with charisma, then going for the catch--*"I feel a connection between us, can I sleep in your shed for six days?"* This activity taught me a lot about Americans. Christian family folk — America's alleged moral elite — almost always refused to acknowledge my existence. In Lake Charles, a Baptist preacher abandoned me at a gas station and told me, "god will find a path for you, boy," before driving off. It was society's stigmatized — **deadbeats, ex-cons, outlaws, runaways, and acid freaks** — who showed me sympathy and lent me a helping hand when I was in need; whether that meant a meal, place to sleep, or just someone to talk to. But beyond freak charity, there were a few other key factors that enabled my success. First up: undocumented laborers. They hitched me three-fourths of my rides and never asked for a dollar. This was around the time a goofball presidential candidate called Trump was calling them rapists-- a slur they forebodingly laughed off. Quite far from rapists, they were my guardian angels, descending in cowboy hats and reflective workwear to save me in my deepest moments of despair. Ted Conover describes them as the modern hoboes of today's world, and he's right -- not schizophrenic teenagers in Carhartt overalls. Also, a splash of melanin or estrogen would have made this trip impossible. My lily white skin and supple male body gave me an aura of legitimacy and innocence in the eyes of highway patrolman, *CouchSurfing* hosts, truck drivers, and, of course—supermarket loss prevention officers, whose jovial digestion of the phrase '*sorry sir, I must have lost my receipt*,' turned many hungry nights into rotisserie chicken feasts.

The stories in the pages ahead are somewhat Gonzo--mostly true-to-life, though featuring some elements of fantasy; mostly in my construction of dialogue. They're about me and the trip but mostly: the people I met along the way .. **a beggar, a prisoner, a tagger, a sex worker, a blues legend, and a living meme.**

Enjoy
Andrew Thomas Callaghan
May 24 2018
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

CHAPTER one

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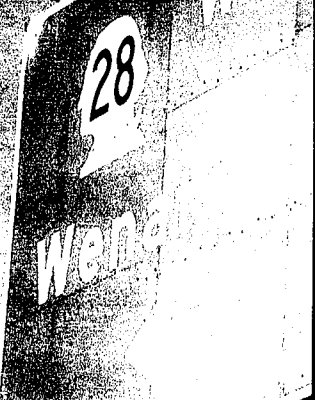


Sprawled out on the steps of the Louisiana capitol building, I stared up at the blue sky and spooned greek yogurt into my mouth. State politicians were forced to step over me like a pile of dog shit.

"Howdy," one said.

I looked up at him, sucking yogurt from my pointer finger and saying nothing.

"*What in the Christ* .."

Just then, my CouchSurfing host arrived— 'Bryson, 34, *Catholic Cajun on a Motorcycle*.'

His house was a decrepit bungalow on the edge of town that met none of the listed criteria. Bryson had no motorcycle, nor were there any religious symbols in his house or Cajun spices in his pantry, but I was in no position to complain. I curled up on his couch and drifted off.

Bryson was a curious creature. His library — a massive wooden bookshelf — only had about twenty books in it. Half of them were about recovering from porn addiction and the rest were illustrated children's books. He also had a massive Red Hot Chili Peppers logo tattooed on his forearm— the red asterisk. The next morning, he was wearing a tank top depicting the same image. "You don't you happen to like the red hot chili peppers, do you?" I asked him, oozing with sarcasm. "Bro, you serious? I friggin' love the peppers!"

I left a few hours later with plans to hitchhike West. Bryson sent me off with a tub of almond butter, a packet of rice crackers, and a CD—the band is obvious.

Internally, I was fuming-- *a fucking CD-rom Bryson? Does it come with a Walkman? I cannot afford to be weighed down by this goddamn fossil!*

"Thanks man, I really appreciate it," I said.

I felt a buzz at my side—a text from my roommate George. He's the only person I'd told about my plan. *Janitors are throwing away ALL the shit in your*

Lol. U finding yourself bro?

George's question implies that I, unlike him, am a complete lunatic; a madman wandering through life with no sense of self, who one of these nights — maybe starving below a bridge somewhere — will begin to see things clearly. And *shucks* . . maybe he's right. I ought to quit while I'm ahead; get a real job and move into a triple-alarmed house on a cul-de-sac somewhere, where I'll raise a few kids and *finally* be able to wave this travel phase goodbye and bury this diary where it belongs: in a baby coffin under my fresh-cut lawn, to be unearthed by some horrified landscaper down the line. Of course, my nagging whale of wife will inevitably try to force me into travel— maybe drive

the kids to Disney World to see Mickey or book a resort in Aruba for our anniversary — but I'll tell her time and time again, shouting over ESPN highlights through the latch of my man cave: *not this year babe, I've been down this road. Travel is for acid freaks and Mexicans.*

I understand George though. I suppose that since Google Earth has killed off the lore of uncharted lands with satellite imaging, travel is the sport of a delusional maniac with a Columbus complex. With every square mile of earth now at public disposal, travelers are just about as usless as cartographers, if not more so, because travelers contribute nothing to society and never shut up about Thailand -- *the chicks have dicks, bro!*

There must be something genuinely up with me though, from a mental health perspective. What I am doing now is not the activity of a stable person. *Why did I do this?* I'm not even sure, though I have a theory. .

Insanity Theory

It all began one fateful night: a sleepover at my friend Toby's house. It was the first weekend of ninth grade. Toby and I bought an eighth of magic mushrooms. Shortly after midnight struck, we scarfed them down. We had ordered a National Geographic special called *Roar of the Darkness*, which we assumed to be a pleasant safari documentary. It was not to be. We soon realized it was a movie about poaching, featuring graphic sequences of hunters slaughtering families of African lions, but It was too late. The psilocybin had taken full effect, and I found myself floundering on the floor, shrieking ***"the lions are dying!"***, and grieved until I knocked out. I didn't know it then, but my first trip - a bad trip - would turn me into a weirdo, *for life.*

The next morning, I awoke into a wonky hellscape. My vision was glitching; flickering with television static and skipping between frames

like a scratched DVD disc. Walls wobbled and the colors of objects bled into one another. It was like tripping, but without the euphoria—just visual chaos. I laughed it off, figuring that the shrooms were still working their way out of my system. But a week later, it was still there; and then a month, then a *year*. Peoples facial features—particularly their eyebrows—would warp like worms if I held eye contact with them for more than a few seconds. I became a ball of existential dread: constantly dissociated and rolling through life at maximum anxiety. I later learned that I'd developed a condition called H.P.P.D, though at the time, I remember logically deducing that I was a formless being, held prisoner by an expendable suit of flesh and bones. I thought I'd move on from "Andrew" to enter the karmic realm as a spiritual being who could communicate with trees and planets. This hysteria soon met its end. One day after school, I collapsed onto the floor of my dad's basement. My eyes bugged out like a shell-shocked trench soldier's. I was immovable; barely able to eat, sleep, or speak. I plunged into a dissociative blackout that lasted for four days.

He who descended is the one who will also ascend far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.
Proverbs 12:10

When the blackout ended, it felt like I'd awoken from a night terror. I felt stable and safe, embraced by an unfiltered reality. My shrink Dr. Emerald tried to put me on heavy doses of Kolonopin and Prozac to calm me down. He'd even mimic my speech patterns — "*listen, this .. shit .. will truly help you ..dog*" — but it was too late. For the first time in years, I felt in-body, and was treating that freedom like an Amish teenager let loose in a whorehouse. I began flexing egregiously: smoking blunts, guzzling liquor, pushing carts of spray paint, and of course, *rapping* about it all ad-nauseam, meanwhile persecuting nonbelievers and burning bridges with anyone who denied my divinity. To everyone else, I probably appeared unstable— a brace-faced goblin in women's sunglasses ransacking party houses — but in reality, I was all-the-way-there; an adrenaline junkie compensating for years of lost time. This new man was not *Andrew*, in the traditional sense. He had a name, though: ***Trek God.***

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall
Proverbs 16:18

It was a typical afternoon in my eleventh-grade Physics class. I was sitting in the back row with my headphones in, scribbling tags in my notebook and throwing paper balls at anyone who dared to concentrate. Suddenly, my high school's Dean of Students walked in and pulled me out of class. He walked me down to his office, where I encountered my mother. She was sitting in his chair, reading a printed-out sheet of my rap lyrics, presumably which he'd transcribed himself.

"Hey mom."

--

"Backdooring bitches on my white goon shit with a bagged up zip in my north face vest."

Dean Devon chimed in —

"Bitch I got that syrup in my system, with a package of that purple and you know I'm bout to flip it. I been grinding all the time, you know I got it for the low, and I'm honest, bitch I promise that this shit is not a joke."

"I'm role playing .. it's a character," I protested. "Like Slim Shady."

Dean Devon flipped open his laptop, pulled up my Twitter account and began reading from my feed.

TREK ALLAH Follow

I GOT BIG ASS FUCKIN BAGS OF KUSH ON DECK AT SCHOOL RN .. 2 FOR THE 15 ALL WEEK tap TF in bitch !!

TREK ALLAH Follow

WHICH 1 of YOU THOTTIES TRYNA POP IT AT MY MOLLY SPODIE ON FRIDAY THOO #freeCUPSforTHICKhoes

"Im really not picking up on the joke here," Devon said, "and by the way, I know what a *molly spodie* is."

"Dude, Its a *joke*."

"Look . . even if you don't have the most structure at home," he said, glaring down at my mother, "that's just not *our* responsibility."

I thought of Dean Devon's son, who was known for sprinting out of supermarkets dual wielding Budweiser twelve-packs. Though aside from being a structureless deviant, he was a huge fan of my music. I'd purposely featured him in one of my music videos. Perhaps this is what really triggered him.

"Young man, the administration is initiating the process of your expulsion."

So began my impromptu vacation. For about a week, I was living large — working overtime on rap and graffiti — until I received a letter from Seattle Police Department's graffiti detective, Jon Yung. I was being charged with two graffiti-related crimes. Historically, Yung was a complete flatfoot, who had been demoted to graffiti detail after twenty years in the force. He'd essentially gone from raiding child molesters to monitoring the Instagram pages of of seventeen year-olds. Yet despite three years of 'undercover field research,' which involved riding the #5 metro bus dressed like a Run-DMC backup dancer profiling 'graffiti types,' he'd failed to identify a single one of us. I was his *chance* to make a splash, but in typical Detective Yung fashion, he was a *no-show* at my court date. In his absence, I was able to convince the judge that I was some sort of benign web designer who'd never touched spray paint. The judge belly-laughed, issued me a diversion and voided my criminal record. A week later, I had my expulsion hearing. To my surprise, Dean Devon allowed me back into school, but under the condition of an immediate shit-canning for any future fuck-ups.

All said and done, I was a few left turns away from becoming an incarcerated dropout and realized labels like *party rapper, mural bomber*, and *kush plug* would soon lose their bad-boy appeal and be summed up under *loser* in adulthood. So I started to take it easy; shying from the public eye and focusing on my grades. Naturally, Trek God's halo dimmed, and with it, a new persona was forced into existence: ***College Andrew.*** He wouldn't wear Air Max 97s and paint-covered North Face Parkas. He'd wear Desert Boots and American Eagle button-downs. I would look like the kind of person Trek God would have sold an ounce of oregano to, but I saw no other option.

Before I knew it, I was three-thousand feet up, on a one-way flight to New Orleans. I was headed to Loyola University, where I'd study journalism on a $35,000 scholarship which was awarded -- in part -- for my graffiti photography . . . .

soon, Trek God was *dead.* I was playing College Andrew, living inside a tiny dorm room and taking torturous common-core courses where I was forced to memorize military facts about the Han Dynasty and learn the name of a spider's penis: pedipalps. All-the-while, I carefully covered my tracks, making sure nobody knew *who* or *what* Trek God was.

I spent most of my free time binge drinking with strangers at *The Boot,* a glorified groping lounge just a few blocks from the dorms. I had a solid

group of friends, but college hosted a demographic I was wholly unfamiliar with: *frat boys* plus their equally nauseating female equivalents. I had never actually seen them in real life before, but it was shocking. I saw rich, coke-addicted protein junkies letting themselves be ass-paddled for the social validation of twenty-two year old finance majors — "*Oh, yes. Punish me, big brother!*" and thus decided that none of them were allowed to challenge me, for any reason. This would soon create problems.

One regular Friday night, *The Boot* was completely empty. This mystery was soon resolved. A Polo-clad messenger arrived:

"*Open house at SAE!*", he yelled— a local fraternity house.

I was with my dorm-mates, most of whom were Black. We walked over to the frat. As we walked through the door, a bulky bro in a visor stuck his arm out — blocking the doorway — and began spewing bullshit.

"Listen man, we're kind of winding things down," he said. It was only ten o'clock.

"What do you mean?" I asked. He leaned in and started whispering in my ear.

"Honestly bro, *you* can get in, but not all the squad you're with, unless you're tryna come back with *two* girls for *each* dude."

As he spoke, several groups of white guys walked right on in, without girls. My friends and I were fully triggered. We spent the next five minutes screaming something to the tune of "*racists! rapists! pussies!*". The bulky bro scrambled for minority representation and ultimately summoned a light-skinned pledge in an American flag tank top, who began thundering about the colorblind philosophies of SAE while pointing to some handbook, to which my friend Malcolm responded, "kill yourself, Uncle Tom." The frat boys refused to fight us, so my roommates and I stormed off, bought a bottle of cheap vodka, then drank the night away.

red pick-up truck pulled up next to me.

"Yo, there's that faggot who was talking shit earlier!" one passenger yelled.

I braced myself. Five bros leapt from the truck's bed and unleashed the weakest flurry of punches I have ever felt. It felt like a full-body massage and I didn't sustain a single bruise. Still, the emotional scars cut deep.

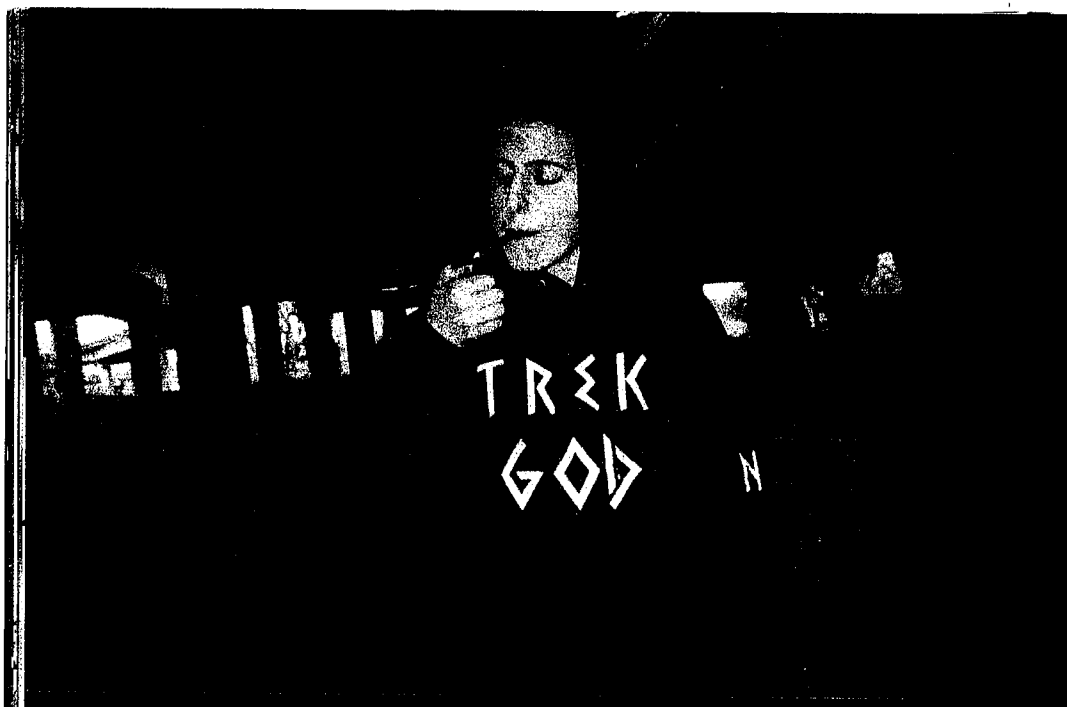
Fuck College Andrew, I thought. *Nobody would've tried that shit with Trek God.*

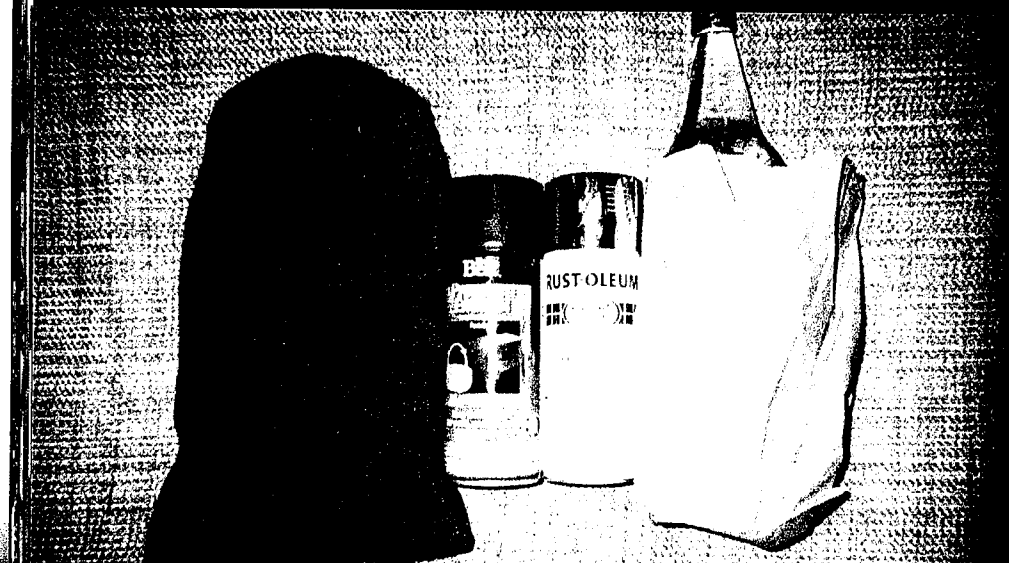
The next night, presumably speaking in the cadence of Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream,* I delivered an explosive speech outside *The Boot* to an audience of forty students. Somehow; this started a riot. The tequila has fully taken my memory, so I'm not quite sure what I said, but I know that I led my them sprinting through miles of residential streets; kicking over trash cans and inspiring a counter-riot of heroic locals, who trailed us with video cameras. All-the-while, I led a chant: "*Fuck Loyola! Fuck New Orleans!*" As the chaos dissolved, I led my comrades back to the dorms. I felt like Fidel Castro, entering surrendered Havana with a parade of his guerrillas. But as sobriety began to set in, I became very confused. *How had I whipped forty souls into such a frenzy?* I was commanding a sort of feverish loyalty from these people, but I didn't even know their names. *How? What had I said to them?*

"Speech, speech!" they roared.

I leapt up onto an electrical box, looked over my comrades and prepared to improvise. But before I could get any words out, I was cut off by a rioter with words that made my heart sink, and arguably the words that drove me to Baton Rouge, and away from New Orleans, for good ----

"Trek God cannot be stopped!"


TREK
GOD


RUST-OLEUM

Illustrated by Dominic Frost

THE CAJUN BARNHOUSE

my first ride

LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

MAY 30, 2016

Holy shit, I'm really about to do this, I thought before sticking my thumb out onto the interstate.

It was the third consecutive day of ninety-seven degree humidity and I was a sweaty mess. You could have filled a pint glass ringing out my boxers. The mosquitoes had feasted on my skin and I'd scratched the bites raw in my sleep, so it looked like my arms were covered in oozing hepatic sores. It didn't help being stalked by Zydeco music; the hellish accordion fiddling that runs through Lafayette like an autistic gene.

The word around town was clear: nobody's going West, nobody's going to Texas, *we just love Laffy y'all -- oh gawd, look . . that escaped ebola patient is comin' straight for our dang window!*

HOUSTON, my cardboard sign read.

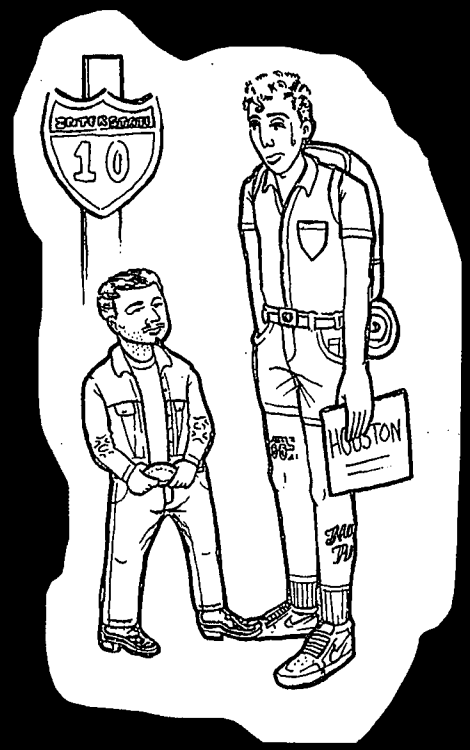
The fat-faced robot commanders sat motionless behind their wheels, ignoring me as they roared by, as If *I* was the weird one. After an hour of rejection, I started to grow dizzy and a waxy, grey film had collected on my skin. Nausea was peaking. *Guhhh!*—I launched a sudden spew of puke onto the road, slapping a P.T. Cruiser's side mirror and splattering its dashboard. *Fuck it,* I thought, *dude's going way too fast to stop.*

As more hours passed, my thumbs began to lose their erections, and soon; were fully flaccid. Without my twin soldiers up and fighting, I felt hopeless, so I started waving my arms through the air like a windmill and yelling "*help me!*" like I was in dire crisis.

No luck. I walked down the highway offramp toward a truck stop and set my sights on its mini mart, where I planned to bury some KIND bars in my scrotal region and look for a cool nook to nuzzle into.

As I approached the store, a beat-up blue Mazda screeched to a halt a few dozen feet behind me and honked its horn. The car had a bashed back window and a sticker of the Honduran flag in place of a license plate. A hairy arm poked out from the driver-side window and waved me forward. I tightened my backpack straps and sprinted up to his window.

The almond-skinned man at the wheel stepped out to greet me. He was of scientifically fascinating smallness. Even standing on his tippy toes, his eyes aligned with my belly button. His face was handsome though, in a rugged sort of way. His square jaw was complemented by his crystal blue eyes. He was wearing his hair slicked back with an acid-washed denim True Religion jacket bedazzled with gemstones. He like looked a Miami club



promoter - the kind that also sells roofies.

"Hi. English not so good .. *donde?*"

I pointed to my sign. From what I could gather, he was a migrant farmworker working in Lafayette on a seasonal visa. He wires most of his paychecks to his family, who live in a slum on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa.

"Ah. Yo hablo un poquito español. Yo quiero ir a Houston, podemos?" I asked.

"SI, si amigo, vamos a Houston," he said, *"lez drive."*

I hopped in and we skidded on to mighty Interstate Ten. I should mention; his car was a ja-

partially constructed, as if half the workers at its factory had given up midway down the assembly line. Loose wires tickled my kneecaps, but I was in no position to complain, I was *on the road*, like Jack Kerouac! *Fantastic!*

For the first ten minutes of our drive, the little guy didn't say a word. Out of respect, I waited for him to break the silence, but he was mute and expressionless.

"Te gustas porn?" he finally asked me.

"Yeah, porn's alright," I said.

"Te gustas movies?"

"Yeah, movies are chill."

He clenched his face as if in agony, took a brief glance out the rear window, then floored the gas and made a five-lane merge onto the highway exit.

"*Oh, fuck yeah*," he grumbled, biting his lip as if milliseconds from orgasm.

"Are you ok man? Yo .. why are we getting off the freeway?" I asked him.

"Esta bien," he said. *Is it really bien though fam?* Probably. It made no difference to me. If push came to shove, I could fling this peewee out the window and drive myself to Houston. Plus, I'd rather be there than with those peons back at Loyola. I was comforted by imagining my classmates staring at my empty desk in confusion — "*geez, looks like crazy Trek God overslept again!*" . . Dead wrong, *fuckers*!

Soon, we were driving on a narrow dirt road through a canefield. Our car was submerged in darkness, shaded on both sides by tall walls of stalks that swooned onto the road and smacked our windshield. We drove deeper and deeper, until the interstate was reduced to a faint hum. At the end of the road, I could make out a triangular silhouette. As we grew closer, I could see; it was a

rickety barn house, painted cherry-red with black shutters.

"What's this place?" I asked, glancing back through the fields. We weren't on a shortcut to anywhere. This barn was the last stop on a dead end road. I thought about jumping out of the car and booking it, but we were too deep. My window for escape had closed.

"Wait," he said. We parked in the dirt lot out back. A dozen eighteen-wheeler trucks were parked next to us, all reading Louisiana plates. We hopped out of the car and approached the barn's towering doors. Above the iron door handle, there was a buzzer-box wired to an overhead surveillance camera. The little man punched a four-digit code into the box. *Bzzzzztt.* Apparently automatic, the barn's doors creaked, screeched, then opened outwardly like two arms, welcoming us into the abyss.

"Guhawhaw" ... "yeeeeeaw!" ...

The hay-floored barn was an echo chamber of cackling laughter and indecipherable cajun banter. Zydeco blared. Twelve gargantuan white man sat around a circular poker table, taking swigs of whiskey and chopping up lines of white powder. Their unkept neck-beards were stained brown and most of them had string warts and rotting teeth. They were playing Go Fish with quarters, sitting in plastic lawn chairs that warped under their weights. Each one of these mutants seemed pulled directly from the Appalachian rape nightmares I'd had after watching *Deliverance* when I was eleven.

One cross-eyed trucker in a John Deere hat pressed his nose to the table's edge and took a six-second toot of crushed up Sudafed, then whipped his head up and fixed his eyes on me—"*yaw*!" .

"Two *teek-etts* please," the Honduran man said to one of the truckers, then handed him a ten dollar bill.

The trucker ripped me a flimsy carnival ticket and escorted us through a short doorway into the barn's back room; a dimly lit theater room with twelve seats. Its walls were lined with confederate flags and pornography posters. At the front of the room, porn was being projected onto a wooden barn wall.

In the cupholders of each chair, there was a bottle of hand lotion, a dixie cup and booklet of tissues. Half of the twelve seats were already seated by truckers, most of whom were masturbating, *furiously*. The scent of moldy cheese lingered.

A few feet away from me, I watched a sweaty man go at it. After thirty seconds of rapid-fire wrist pumping, he rolled his eyes back into his head, kicked his feet up, yelled "*hyuhhh!*" and fell forward from his seat, collapsing into the fetal position. Right then, a wave of nausea hit me. I sat down in the corner chair, furthest from anyone else and kept my eyes glued to my phone.

Despite the fact that half of the seats remained open, the little man chose the seat right next to mine. He sat down, then scooted his chair closer to mine, so that our armrests were touching.

I let out a nervous laugh, put my phone away and began watching the porn. As I watched, I could feel the little man's gaze. I glanced over at him. He was staring at my cheekbone and stroking the crotch of his bedazzled jeans.

He leaned over, closed his eyes, and nuzzled his nose on my left shoulder. I jerked up, pushing him off. He then slouched back into his chair, bulged his eyes and stuck his tounge. He started panting like a dog dying from dehydration.

"Yo, man, what the fuck are you doing?" I asked him.

He began unbuckling his belt -- "How big is it? How big? Grande?" he asked me, *"big dick man*?"

"Yo man, I'm not really into all this type of shit," I said to him. My voice was cracking.

"Don't be ashamed, we can do it together," he said. He touched me, gripping my exposed right knee with his left hand and leaned back in toward my neck.

"Don't be ashamed," he said.

A paralyzing chill shot down my spine. I had to act fast. In a burst of animal instinct; I leapt up, balled my fists together, stared into his eyes with a primal glare and roared a phrase I thought I'd never utter--

"I*'m not fucking gay bro!*"

All masturbation halted. One of the truckers muted the porn's audio. The room turned dead silent. Chairs swiveled toward me. The truckers — some of them still dick-in-hand —looked up at me with hurt eyes, like I was a vile homophobe.

"What the fuck, *dude*?" one asked.

The little man jumped up from his chair, tucked his erection into a denim crotch-crevice, then backed away from me in dramatic steps. His face was twisted in confusion.

"*Dios mio*! So why *that* truck stop?" he asked.

"Dude, I'm just trying to get a ride to Houston. I'm going all the way to Seattle, hitchhiking. I'm just trying to adventure . . an *explore the country* type thing," I said.

"Washington?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said, "Washington."

The other truckers exploded into knee-slapping laughter. — *"you gawt' to be' shietin me!" . . "Guhh-huhu, dat bo' der' said 'sssplore the dang cunntry!*"

The Honduran man smiled and shook his head. I half-expected him to point to a hidden camera and tell me this was all part of prank. He gave me a businessman's handshake, accompanied by a bro-hug.

"Lo siento," he said.

"Um .. it's all good," I said, "I didn't mean to yell at you, man."

"But . . that *lugar*.. truck place ..is for fucking," he said, then clasped his hands and thumped his palms together.

Oh god -- "So .. you think that I am a prostitute?" I asked.

"Si, yes. But, man, we can go . . esta bien . . vamos."

"Esta bien?" I asked.

"Si. Esta bien, mi amigo," he said with a smile.

Soon, we were back in his shredded-up car, driving back through the cane fields and onto Interstate Ten. I noticed that we were heading east, back toward the prostitute truck stop we came from.

"Amigo. Podemos ir a Houston, o no?" I asked him.

He didn't respond. His expression was blank. Soon, we arrived back at the truck stop mini mart where he had first picked me up. He slammed on the brakes, reached over and flung open my door.

"Adios!' he said.

"Dude, are you serious?" I asked.

"Adios!"

As I hopped out of his car, one of the transient teens hanging outside the mart approached his window. They shared a few words, had a laugh, then the teen hopped in shotgun and slammed the door. The little man revved up the engine, waved goodbye, then peeled out of the lot. They drove back onto Interstate Ten, disappearing among the robots.

Goodbye my friend.

TUPAC'S GHOST

trouble in paradise

LAS VEGAS NEVADA

"What would you do" I said, squeezing Tony Stark's hand with force and smiling maniacially, "if I tell all of these kids that you are a *god damn* imposter?"

"Get the fuck off me, bro!" he yelled, pushing me into the crowd. A dense father caught my fall, picked me from the armpits and ran me halfway down the block.

"You can fuck right off *thataway*, buddy!" he yelled, tossing me into the manicured hedges of the Eiffel Tower casino complex.

Fuck it, time to get rich. I brushed the dirt off my shirt and waltzed into the casino.

"Bawn-george," the sleepy-eyed doorman said. I sat down at a slot machine and fed it a few quarters.

I noticed a white-faced mime in a striped shirt and beret, prancing around the casino floor delivering free drinks on a silver platter.

"Monsieur!" I yelled, "*Monsieur*!"

The frenchman finally made his way to my seat.

"Monsieur, please get me a triple-shot of vodka on the rocks, *no ice*. Step on it, please. I'm here to do big business."

"Aight, I *gotchu* fam," he said.

Right then, I felt a Samoan's gaze.

I looked at up, smiled, then issued a preemptive strike--

"Sir. I don't *believe* In identification."

"Oh. Well . . we believe in identification . . and this is my casino" he said.

"This is *your* casino?"

"Listen kid, don't be a smart-ass."

I know this.

"Officer, am I being detained?"

He whispered something into his shirt collar, so I scurried off back to the strip. I've been on the road for just four weeks, yet it feels like I'm on the cusp of losing my mind--and with it, my charm. Fishing for strangers has become increasingly difficult. To put in perspective; just a month ago, I was shopping at Whole Foods and *easily* being taken in by family folk. Today, I climbed out the window of a Waffle House bathroom to avoid paying a four-dollar bill and last night I slept sandwiched between two yoga mats in the closet of an Anytime Fitness.

I caught my reflection in the window of a passing party bus and gasped. My face was pimpled and covered in dirt. My hair was flaring wildly and stained blonde from the sun. My jeans were ripped up and the soles of my shoes were detached. I looked *full transient.* The Vegas strip was no place for a wretch like me. I decide to wander off-strip; which I soon discovered to be nothing more than a deserted trashscape of bullet shells, dirty syringes, bloody toiler paper and used condoms. I walked about six miles through the putrid desert, until I came to a fenced pedestrian bridge that ran over a dry riverbank. As I walked over it, I heard junkies were going absolutely berserk; screeching like animals being neutered and shitting everywhere. Around thirty of them were huddled around a tunnel opening. Perhaps thirty-feet wide, the tunnel looked like a black hole— hosting a complete darkness that loomed just a few feet from its entrance.

I climbed down from the pedestrian bridge and approached the tunnel.

"Hi there!" a junkie yelled, jetting toward me. Though I looked gross, I didn't look quite homeless enough to pass with this crowd. I had to think fast.

"*D-d-dogfish fuggin blarney! Please, please. . Get out of my head!*" I screeched.

He backed off and I slid into the tunnels.

The tunnels were built in the 1950s as flood ducts to accommodate a rainfall that would never come. They've been bone-dry for decades and have become a village for the permanent homeless. The tunnels snake below Vegas for over thirty miles, beginning around the Luxor Casino and ending at Nellis Air Force Base on the north side of town.

I walked about a mile deep into the tunnels until I was alone and couldn't see my hands. Tinnitus rang in my ears. Sensory deprivation began to kick in, so I tried to lie down for a nap, but freezing blasts of cold air came wooshing in and chilled my bones. They carried the smell of aerosol. That reminded me; *I should spray.* I pulled a can of black paint from my bag and began spraying the wall.

"*Fuck!*" I heard a raspy voice yell from only about twenty feet away.

"Hello?" I said.

"Stinks like shit, man."

"My bad, I'll stop."

I turned on my phone flashlight and pointed it toward the voice. Just ten feet away from me, a craggy-skinned, tattooed man was lying down on a cot; hoisted up by a bed frame built from milk crates. He was surrounded by makeshift furnishings: a wooden bookshelf, a pressure cooker, a battery-powered radio player, and a stinky bucket with a toilet seat propped on its rim. An orange cat was sitting on the mans chest, purring.

The man shrieked as the flashlight hit his face --- "*Christ!* I can go fucking blind like that, you know!"

"Oh. My bad."

"What the fuck isya doin' down here anyway?" He asked.

"What the fuck are *you* doing down here?"

"Real fuckin' long story kid."

"Same here," I said.

"Today's no time for storytime. Keep moving," he said. "No pictures."

"Ok, will do. What's your name, though?" I asked.

"Teddy."

Somehow, my phone still had some signal. I opened *maps* to see where I was in relation to the upperworld. I couldn't believe it: I was below Trump Casino. I pulled out my journal and began writing.

The High Roller
a work of fantasy
written in the tunnels

There's a high roller above. He drives in from Phoenix on the weekends. The concierges know him by name. They've upgraded him to the presidential suite this time around, free of charge. Tonight, he's back in the game, doing what he does best: *winning*.

Frank Sinatra is playing. Top-shelf whiskey is flowing and cocaine is pumping into his brain -- *Little Johnny's* college fund was supposed to be off limits, but he's on a roll tonight.

"I'll gonna send that little fucker to college *twice*!" He says, then rolls the dice. *Snake eyes.* The dealer smiles. He's lost it all. The high roller collapses onto the red carpet below the padded table and begins shaking until he is babbling in a pool of his own sweat, straddling the legs of the mystery man who's off to blow little Johnny's future on hookers and blow on Fremont Street.

"Please, please, just give it back. I'll do anything .. anything," the high roller whimpers, "*I will be your slave . .*"

In his desperate plea, the high roller reaches into his wallet and pulls out Little Johnny's kindergarten photo, but when he sees Johnnys angelic face, he grows angry and begins screaming in rage.

"*You motherfuckers*! You sons-of-bitches! I oughta murder all of you! You ruined my sons life! I'll have to send that little bastard to the army .. or community college!"

At this point, the Samoans are dragging the high roller through the lobby by his legs. He's screaming, foaming from the mouth like a rabid dog and speaking in tongues. Tourists in the lobby are horrified. Concierges are telling the Chinese that it is performance art. The Samoans toss the high roller out the front door like a javelin. He lands right on the Las Vegas strip, hitting the pavement with a thud. He looks up and sees Iron Man, who is *also* crying, but because of an altercation he'd had earlier. Some drunk homeless kid had tried to blow his cover.

"I'm down on my last. You know a cheap place to get a room tonight?" the high roller asks.

Tony Stark dries his eyes, laughs, then points

"Looks like your luck is up, Teddy."

A tunnel bum is made.

I walked through the tunnels for about another mile until I found a tiny opening to crawl out of, which spit me into the sidestreets of a North Vegas ghetto. The first thing I saw was a billboard in the distance that read *grenades and AR-15s ON SALE NOW.* I followed it like the North Star until I came to a main road; a neon boneyard lined with pawn shops and gun stores. The street was roamed by sunken-faced women who looked ageless and more-or-less identical. Their collapsed jaws give them permanent frowns, their exposed thighs were grooved by track marks and their faces were smeared with makeup. Every few minutes, an SUV pulled over to swoop one— or two — away. Every group of girls seemed to be shadowed by a bug-eyed man in an oversized Tapout t-shirt, sporting dermal piercings and cold sores, cocking his head every-which-way, looking for pedestrians to make murderous eye contact with. North Vegans are close to death and ready for war.

As I walked along, one guy ran accross the street to block my path.

"You lost foo?" he asked me. Any coherent response would have blown my cover.

I stared at my own hands for a few seconds, then rolled my eyes back and stomped my feet spastically as if trying to set a high score In *Dance Dance Revolution*

"*Get out of my head!*" I shrieked.

"Damn, you good dog?"

I received a text from my friend Dorito, a friend from Seattle. He — for whatever reason — was in Vegas, and wanted to paint a spot, so I met him over at Circus Circus; a dry casino built for families on the northern side of the strip. He had scoped out a train yard nearby.

---

pushed up under my right foot, boosting me over the barbed wire fence. We crept along the edge of the yard and once the coast was clear, began spraying the wall with chrome paint. In the distance, I could her a dog barking. *It's definitely running toward us,* I thought.

note:
I've had a lifelong fear of dogs, which continues to haunt me to this day. Even the sound of a collar rustling puts me into defense mode. Canine apologists often remind me that a bad dog is only the result of a bad owner, but any jawed being that can be converted into an instrument of war after a couple kicks to the abdomen poses a great risk to society. Like the fool who mocks condoms only up until his dick skin is an inoperable wart forest, it may take a tooth hickey from a pack of rabid dingos to bring these apologists to their senses. Holding on for dear life in a hospital bed with their crying families standing over them, begging for some kind of closure, do you think their dying words will be-- "b-b-b-blame the owner'? No, of course not. Owners don't bite. Their last words will be "f-f-f-fuck dogs."

"Shit!" I yelped. I crouched down, as if making myself smaller would somehow deter a vicious attack dog. Dorito laughed and pointed at the Rottweiler. He was caged behind a chain link fence, guarding a cargo container on the other side of the tracks.

Halfway into finishing our fill-ins, we were illuminated by a circular spotlight. The light was coming from above: from a Las Vegas police helicopter. The pilot gave a muffled command over the intercom, but the whirling of its blades were too loud to make out what he was saying. All we knew was that we had to run, *now.* Dorito tossed our duffel bag of paint into some nearby bushes. We bolted down the train tracks. Boxed in on both sides by razor wire, we searched anxiously for an escape, but there was none. Dorito gained a forty-foot lead on me. Suddenly, he came to a dead stop. He turned around and gasped. He had a morbid expression on his face. I had never seen anyone so terrified. He shot his finger up in the air, pointing up at the

chopper lurking in the night sky.
"Andrew bro, holy shit! Yo.. fuck!" he yelped. I had no time to look. I was running too fast. But I knew one thing for certain; it was all over, we were completely fucked.

"Bro .. bro.. Bro!!" Dorito yelled.

"What, what?" I screamed, nearly caught up with him.

"T-t-they're throwing dogs at us!"

I felt my chest cave in. I almost fainted. In the intensity of that moment, I truly believed him. I thought that police -- from the sky -- were *throwing* dogs at us. Maybe they were dropping Pit Bulls in parachutes. Maybe they were rocketing Dalmatians out of cannons like ballistic missiles.

Illuminated by spotlight, we collapsed onto the rocks in tears of laughter. Soon, the spotlight turned off, and the chopper flew away. Maybe they only wanted to scare us. Dorito and I leapt up and found a short brick wall to climb over. We crawled through some shrubbery and inched our way around the block until we were far the crime scene. We found ourselves

smack-dab in another trash desert. It started pouring rain, so -- being Seattleites -- we thought it was a good time to slam a twelve-pack of warm beer. We walked over to a lone gas station, where Dorito bought some Modelos with his fake I.D.. We found a lone bus shelter to sit down and began guzzling. A few beers deep, he noticed a lone electrical pole across the street from our bus shelter. The pole had hundreds of thin Sharpie tags marked on it. He walked over to read what they said.

"Yo, bro, why is every single one of these tags talking about 2pac?"

I walked over. *PAC lives! Long live King Pac! All Eyez on Me! Ambitionz az a ridah,* they read. We imagined this to be some sort of chain reaction, perhaps stemming in parody from one original 2pac tag.

Suddenly, a homeless Native American man appeared from the rainy depths. He walked up to us, smiled, and asked for a beer. Dorito gave him one.

"I appreciate you. Pour some out for Tupac," he said.

We started cracking up, much like we had in the yard a couple hours earlier.

The Native man shot us an angry look.

"Why laugh?" He asked

"Sorry man. It's just . . theres a bunch of 2pac tags on this pole . . and you just happened to mention 2pac. Its kind of wierd."

".. . Tupac was *killed* right here.. right here where we stand," he said, pointing to a crack in the sidewalk.

We took a moment of silence. I poured out the rest of my beer and gave my blessings.

"King Pac watched over us today . . and he will *always* watch over us."

CHAPTER 2

clepto

Seattle

a prolific graffiti writer, notorious for painting overtop murals and appearing on Washington's Most Wanted

35-38

big wendy

Oklahoma City

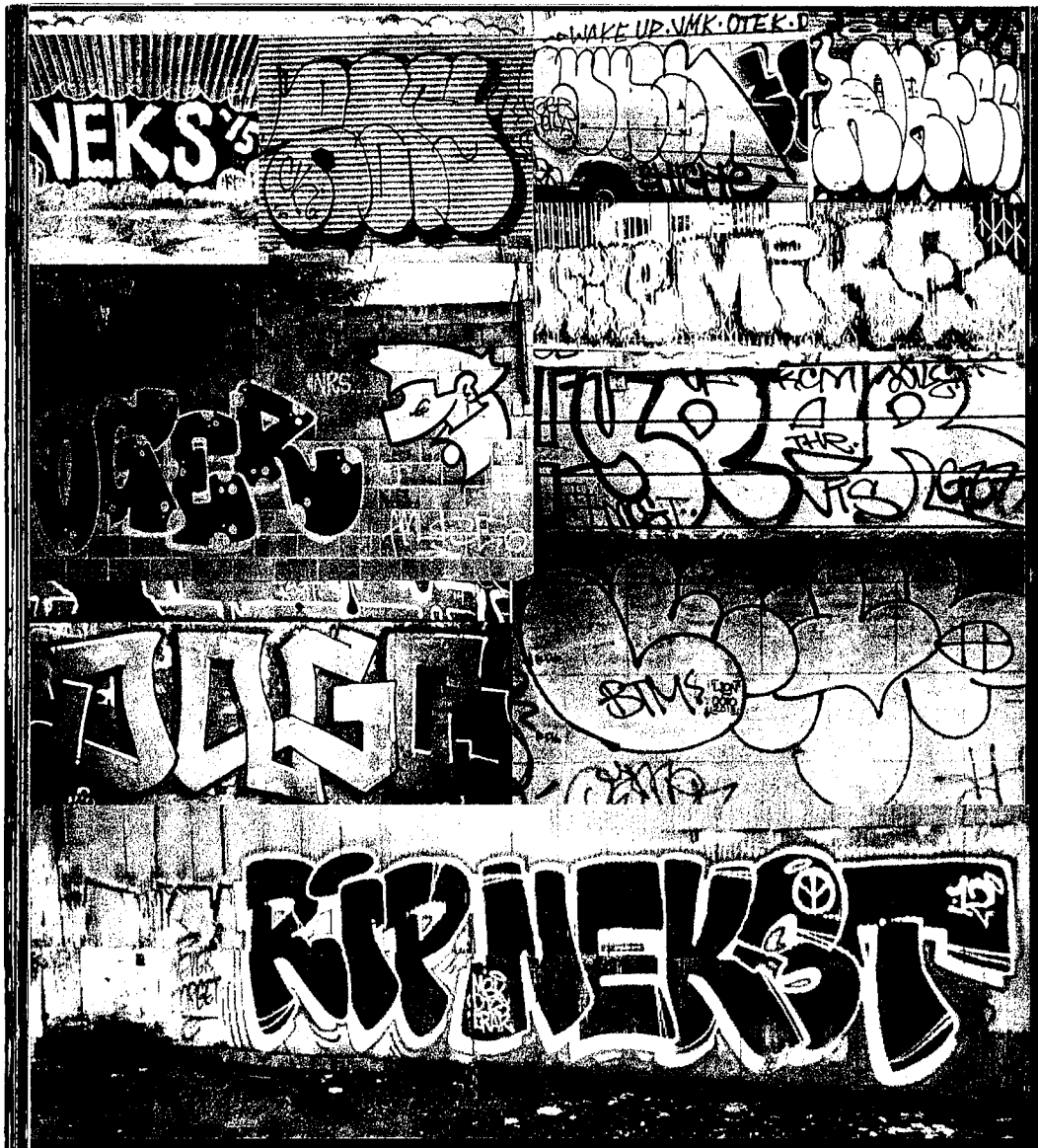
a self-employed sex worker who owns and manages a full-service massage parlor under the facade of a medical billing company

44-47

timothy gay

Angola Prison

an inmate serving a life sentence for an armed robbery he commmitted in 1997. He left behind eight



some favorites
full graff flicks on my old Flickr
"Trek God"

CLEPTO

Seattle
WA

CLEPTO hitched me my final ride; from Tacoma to Seattle. Shortly after returning, we were drinking beers together in a pumpkin patch, glued to our phones.

"*Fuck*!" he yelled out.

A few nights before, he had slipped up. He painted a spot with a hidden camera pointed directly at his face. Now, his face was all over the news. One Seattle detective posted on Facebook that he was now "*one step closer to catching [his] arch nemesis*."

After his television debut, his mentality changed.

"I remember getting drunk just to forget about it. I was fucking terrified. Before then, I didn't really drink at all," CLEPTO said, "I was scared that I was going to get that knock on the door. It would be a detective who put me in handcuffs, and I'd go to jail and all that. That's what I had pictured in my head . . so I

WASHINGTONS MOST WANTED
WANTED IN SEATTLE —

If you live in Seattle you've likely seen the criminal work of a prolific graffiti tagger who calls himself "Clepto."

Now, detectives are giving you a look at the suspect himself — caught on camera doing one of the many felony vandalism crimes he's wanted for that are a scourge to Seattle and cost the city and taxpayers a lot of money to cleanup.

Gradually, his fear morphed into motivation.

"The fear turned into something else. All these people were giving me props, including *you*, I think. You guys were like '*you're good. Fuck the police, they've got nothing on you*,' and stuff . . That general fear went away and gave me more energy to keep going . . it was excitement."

However, it wasn't just the drive for infamy that compelled him to continue painting. The timeline of CLEPTO's rise aligns with the extreme gentrification that has occurred in Seattle over the last five years as a result of *Amazon's* growth. The once *faux-neighborhood* hosting their corporate campus -- South Lake Union -- is now so populous that it has a skyline of its own. Cultural zones like Capitol Hill and the Central District are now being flooded with high-income tech workers and razed to make way for condominium developments. Rent has skyrocketed and Seattle's grit is critically endangered.

Simultaneously, the City has begun a rigorous 'clean-up' campaign to eliminate graffiti. A popular way for cities to eliminate graffiti is by commissioning street artists to paint their murals overtop of it. This appeasement strategy aims to 'meet in the middle' with graffiti writers, but it reeks of appropriation and ultimately creates more conflict, by pitting street art -- graff's palatable hybrid -- against it's mother culture; giving writers like like CLEPTO something to fight for.

"Seattle, it's becoming this place. . . we have Amazon here, and lot of yuppies and hipsters, but the people that don't like your graff is who you are painting for. I think I'm one of those people that paints to just further reinforce, to say *fuck you* to yuppies," CLEPTO said.

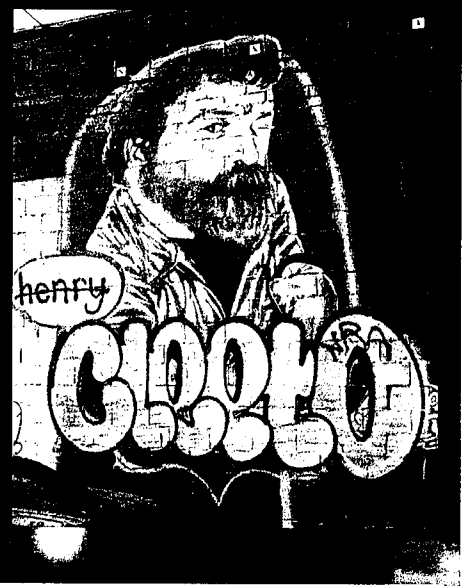
The war between street art and graffiti is happening in gentrifying spaces throughout the country and world, wherever graffiti is halfway muzzled to make room for murals. This instills graffiti writers with a new mission; to preserve graffiti its rawness with an illegal purism that places tags and fill-ins over eveything else.

CLEPTO has painted over a fair amount of high-profile murals in Seattle. However, he applies a code of ethics to this practice.

"You don't want to go over someone's art" CLEPTO said, "but I don't think you shouldn't go out and commission a wall that's had graffiti on it for more than a year. But if its a blank wall and you're trying to get paid, I don't see how there's a problem with it."

In effect, gentrification is not only radicalizing graffiti writers, but radicalizing *graffiti* itself through forcing its writers to rework its definition as a craft that explicitly *excludes* street art, rather than playing the role of a *distant father figure* that it once did. This calls writers like CLEPTO to enforce a standard of grit that has been lost in somewhere in the midst of gentrification. In this climate, graffiti -- particularly painted overtop street art -- is a declaration of war; a free, near-effortless expression of dissidence that serves as a friendly reminder to companies like Amazon that no amount of aesthetic whitewashing can stop native Seattleites from blasting their properties with spray paint and often times; having no

CLEPTO over Seattle-based muralist 'Henry.'
Pic by @hwhoo_hwhare



a leap of faith

told by Clepto

I was with the homie. We were painting on an elevated freeway onramp on an express lane in the Mercer area. There was no shoulder on the side of the road, so we were trying to get it done hella quick. Just picture yourself really close to cars, inches away from them as they're driving past. They're honking, they're hella pissed, and they're dialing, but we're just there, *painting*. It's a hard place to run from too, it's only got sticker bushes below. It was cold, wet and rainy, and we were boxed in by big, tall freeway walls. It took us around five minutes to finish painting. After, We started walking back down the freeway ramp, toward our car. As we walked, a highway patrolman with all of his lights off came creeping down real

"There's a cop coming!" I yell.

At that point, it was every man for himself. I dipped, running across four lanes of busy nighttime traffic and jumping into some sticker bushes between highway directions. At that point, the cop was flipping a U-turn and coming back. I could tell there was more cops coming already, because more than one person had dialed. I think they were planning an ambush. I ran through the darkness, through the bushes between freeway directions, then stripped off my backpack, North Face jacket and flannel. I kept running until I hit a bum camp with a bunch of tents. A bunch of bums and their pit bulls started barking at us, yelling "*get the fuck out of here!*" but I ran right through them. My homie stopped and started petting their dogs!

"Fuck the dogs! Hurry up!" I yelled. I think he was a little more winded than I, but I wasn't about to leave my homie stuck between the highways. So we ran for a while and it felt like we had gotten away. We stopped running and walked for about fifteen minutes, but there was nowhere to go. To our left, there was a giant freeway wall, and to our right, there was a *giant* drop. Soon, we hit a dead end. We couldn't walk onto the freeway, so we were stranded. Right then, a trooper pulled up and stopped.

"There you fuckers are!" he yelled on his intercom. Then he shined his light on us.

"What the fuck do we do?" I asked my homie. He had no idea either. He sat down and started drinking a forty, like he was a bum who had no idea what was going on.

I jumped off the freeway.

My fall was caught by some five-foot tall sticker bushes. Washington state has some really crucial sticker bushes. They hella suck to go inside of, but at the base of them it's easy to crawl through. I forced myself through the bushes, hella deep. My skin was all cut up, but I'd rather be in the sticker bushes than in jail.

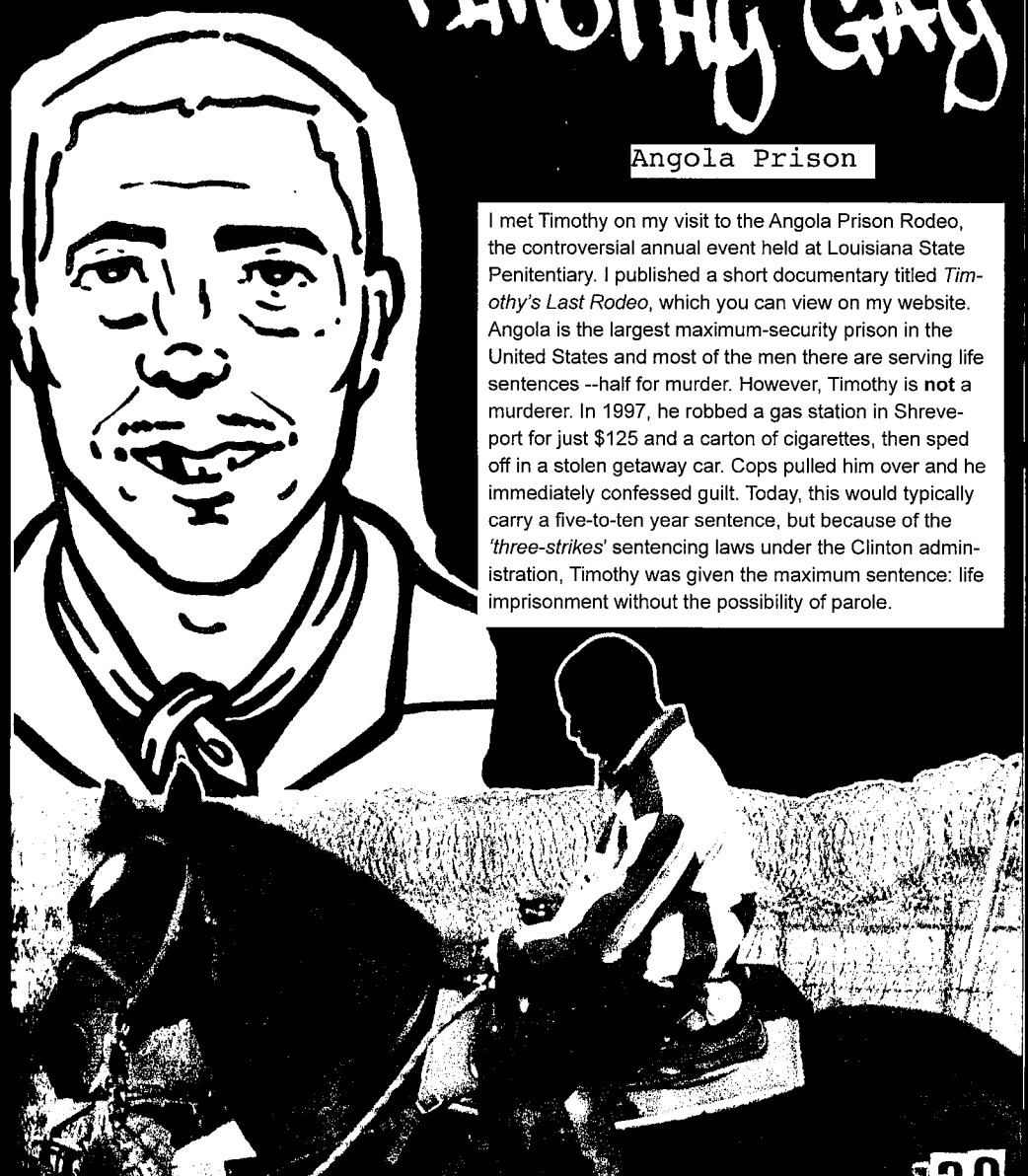
I could hear the police officers on the highway above, so I just froze. I could hear my homie from above, getting arrested. It was pretty dramatic. They were yelling at him trying to get him to snitch-- to tell them where I was at. They threatened to sick the dogs on me. I was fucking scared, and by the way-- totally sober. Plus, I was holding back a cough, and trying not to breathe. I sat in those bushes for two hours while they looked for me. Later, things chilled out and they left. I crawled out of the bushes, got out of there, got into my car, and went home.

I got a call the next day from my homie. I thought he was arrested and he thought I was too. On the phone, we both thought we were snitching each other out. It was really awkward. Funniest thing was-- even though I heard him get arrested, apparently a few minutes later, the police pulled over to transfer him to the Sheriff's custody. They took his handcuffs off for a brief second, so my homie grabbed his backpack off the top of the cop car, which had his spray paint, wallet, keys, and all that. Then he sprinted across five lanes of traffic and jumped off the freeway, just like me. He was fine. He got away. After talking, we quickly realized what happened. We met up and smoked a joint. I think I went out painting the next night.

TIMOTHY GAY

Angola Prison

I met Timothy on my visit to the Angola Prison Rodeo, the controversial annual event held at Louisiana State Penitentiary. I published a short documentary titled *Timothy's Last Rodeo*, which you can view on my website. Angola is the largest maximum-security prison in the United States and most of the men there are serving life sentences --half for murder. However, Timothy is **not** a murderer. In 1997, he robbed a gas station in Shreveport for just $125 and a carton of cigarettes, then sped off in a stolen getaway car. Cops pulled him over and he immediately confessed guilt. Today, this would typically carry a five-to-ten year sentence, but because of the *'three-strikes'* sentencing laws under the Clinton administration, Timothy was given the maximum sentence: life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.



Timothy has spent the last eighteen years at Angola -- a former slave plantation once described as the "bloodiest prison in the South" -- and makes forty cents an hour picking cotton and treating vegetation in the fields. He is what Louisiana's Department of Corrections would call a 'model' inmate. Behind bars, he has reached 'trustee' status due to his near-perfect disciplinary record and is revered among his peers for the rodeo award he won in 2013: *all-around cowboy.*

It is no surprise that the Angola Rodeo -- slogan: '*wildest show in the South*' -- has been an object of scorn, often described as gladiatorial and exploitative. Ten thousand free people flock to the event to watch defenseless inmates wrestle bulls, among other things. Crippling injuries are common. I expected to be horrified, especially watching events like *Guts and Glory,* wherein fifty inmates are sent out to snatch a poker chip off the horns of the "meanest, toughest, Brahma bull available." The winner gets $500 -- equivalent to 3,571 hours pay working in the fields. There's also 'Convict Poker,' where a select few inmates must sit in a lawn chair and remain still as bulls rush and gore them.

To my surprise, my time spent shadowing Timothy gave me a different impression of the Rodeo. Rather than describing it as exploitative, Timothy sees it as a way to break the monotony of Angola and add color to his life. For Timothy, the rodeo is key to his personal *redemption* and the thing he most looks forward to.

Whats your name?

My name is Timothy Gay.

How long have you been in prison?

Ive been here seventeen years. Well .. going on eighteen.

How long is your sentence?

Any possibility of parole?

No possibility of parole, yeah. But since this new stuff came along .. its making me eligible again.

What new stuff are you talking about?

The new laws they had passed .. thats all I got to hope for now.

Timothy is referencing LA Dem. Gov. John Bel Edward's recent reforms, which retroactively expand parole eligibility for non-violent offenders. Unfortunately, these reforms do not affect Timothy's sentence.

Has your attitude changed at all since you first got here?

Oh yeah .. I was terrible when I first got here .. stayed in all kinda stuff. But you know——as time rode along, time brought on a change. My father dy-

ing . . reality really set in on me. You're *here.* Family is leaving. So I had to change myself in order to get myself in a better position, you know? .. if I ever want to go home. So that's what I did.

Where's home?

Its Shreveport.

Do you miss home?

Oh, man, yeah .. yeah.

Can you tell me about the award you received for your performance at Angola?

Bull riding, bareback .. something else I did too. I've kinda forgotten, its been a while. Most of all .. it was it was just the bull ride and bareback. That's what got me the award.

How do you feel when you're out there with the bulls?

I be scared, because you never know what it's gonna do. You *know* its gonna hurt you, but I try not to let my fear control me. That's what gets a lot of dudes hurt. Its one thing to be scared .. [and another] to go out there and be so scared you can't do nothing .. *then* you get hurt.

Without discussing details, what is the charge that brought you here?

Armed Robbery.

Zev: Can you take some of the mentality you've learned from the rodeo into everyday life now?

When I first heard about the rodeo .. I came out here, and I'm like, man.. all the stuff I was doing on the street, I could have gotten killed out there, you know? I use that-- thinking about that-- when I'm in here messing with these bulls. I know they can hurt me, just as well as I could have gotten hurt out there. But you know .. its just the good lord, he's just .. *watching* me. He kept me from getting killed out there and he's keeping me from getting hurt in here.

Can you talk about your life leading up to Angola-- your early childhood and the conditions you were raised in?

Well ... I came up in a good home .. you know, it's just .. you have some kids who just wanna do what they wanna do .. you know? I was one of those kids. You couldn't tell me I couldn't *do this.* I had to go see for myself. The more you told me *no,* the more I was going to do it. I was spoiled .. cried for whatever I wanted and I got it .. but that wasn't enough for me, you know? I sit back and I look at it and say .. *man, you was real stupid!* But its too late.

Dude asked me how do I look at life. So .. my only way I could describe it was a butterfly. So I asked him the question, "what makes a butterfly so beautiful?" Everybody's like *what?* .. I said .. well you gotta think about what a butterfly was *before* he was a butterfly. And thats how I look at life. It took me to go through something to bring me back and make me this beautiful person .... but it's a better person.

So do you feel like you've become a better person since you got to Angola?

Yeah.

In what ways?

Well I get along with people more .. better than I did. At one time, I didn't care to be around nobody. Especially if I didn't know you .. I didn't care what happened to you. Now, I'm the type of person that .. If I could help somebody, I would. My last--I would give it to him. That's just how I am. At one time I could look at a person and say *I don't like him ... I don't want him some help?* Even if they do it back to me, it don't really matter. Long as I know I tried to help somebody.

Can you describe your feelings right now? In a few hours you're going to be riding horses and facing bulls head on.. are you nervous?

No. I left that at the dorm. I've been doing this so long, its to the point that when I come out here, I try to show dudes how to keep from getting hurt. Because the same things they've been doing out here, I saw myself get hurt in the same ways. I be trying to show them a better way of doing it so they won't get hurt .. but they don't listen! So .. if I tell you, and you do it your way ... I can only advise you .. 'hey, don't do this'. But as far going out and doing the events -- just like for instance-- if they put a bull in a chute with my name on it, I'm gonna get on it! Even though I say I ain't riding no more. If they say, *Timothy, we've got a bull, your name is on it, we need you,* imma get on it. But it just so happens they ain't been calling me, so I don't say nothing, because I done got too old for it! I don't hear right! I got kicked out here .. I think it was 2015 .. and my leg still ain't heal right. I tore my ACL. I got kicked by a horse. And that same horse be out here every week! And I look at it .. and I be like *man*.. I be tryna tell dudes about this horse .. but they don't listen. Dude got his leg broke out here .. by that same horse.

So you tore your ACL .. and you've been hurting for a long time, yet you still decided to come out here and do this again. So this must give you some feeling that you just *love*, right?

I just like being around the animals. I mean .. I just love it. When I first did it, I don't know what it did to me. I got on a bull for the first time and I was like man .. when they gon' do this again? It was like a rush .. and I had been doing it ever since. And that was like in 2000 .. and I been doing it ever since 2000 .. but now I done got too old.

But you're still doing it though.

come out and work the rodeo and help around the rodeo chutes, but as far as riding and everything .. this is it. This is my last go round.

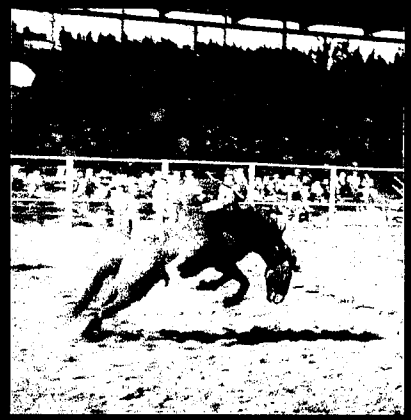
Have any kids on the outside?

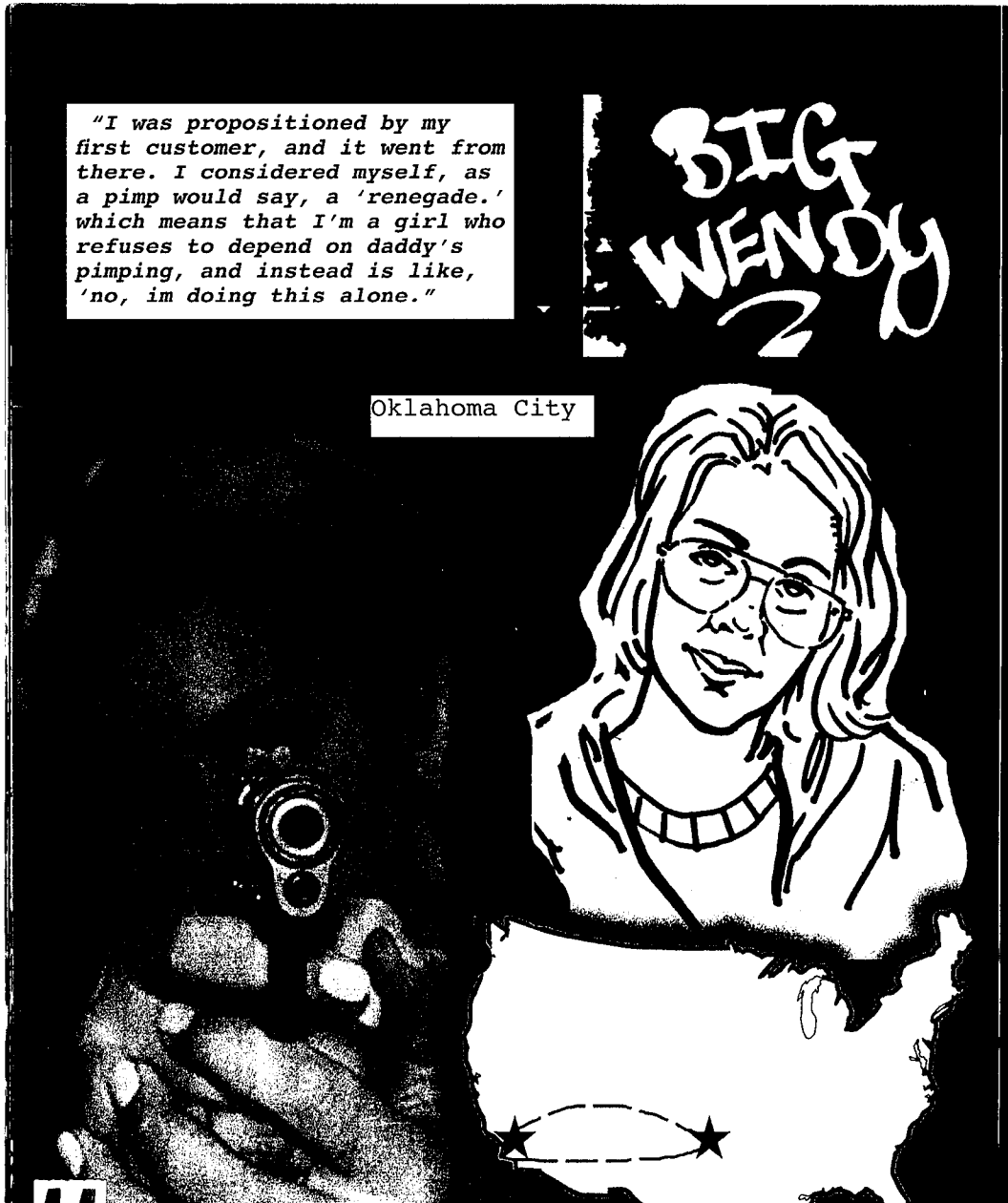
Yeah .. yeah *laugh* .. a bunch . . I got eight.

Any of them ever come and see you?

One. One out of eight .. yeah. Thats it ... She was just here the last rodeo. Yup .. but .. a lot of people ask me .. *Timothy, don't it bother you that thats the only child that come and see you*?

I say *no.* I know where they at. I don't bother me, you know? From time to time I might get a letter from one of them, but It doesn't bother me. I understand why they don't come. I wasn't there for them like I was for [my daughter]. She was in the house with me, the rest of them wasn't. But I can understand [when they say] *my daddy wasn't never there for me,* because mine *was,* but my mother wasn't. I can understand what they're going through.




"I was propositioned by my first customer, and it went from there. I considered myself, as a pimp would say, a 'renegade.' which means that I'm a girl who refuses to depend on daddy's pimping, and instead is like, 'no, im doing this alone."
BIG WENDY 2
Oklahoma City

I first met Wendy at a hipster beer tasting with my *CouchSurfing* host in Oklahoma City. Everyone there was basically a tech bro, except for a six-foot-tall girl standing on the back porch. She was wearing stilettos and speaking twice as loudly as anyone around. I wondered how she had gotten there.

"It's so exhilarating having sex with someone you *know* has killed somebody," she said.

The young professionals around her looked horrified. She explained that she had just gotten back from a birthright trip to Israel. I assumed she was talking about banging the kind of IDF soldiers that murder Palestinian children, so I walked up angrily interjected --

"Hey, are you seriously bragging about banging Israeli soldiers right now?"

"No, dude. Not Israeli soldiers. But I've banged a lot of crazy ass gangbangers in L.A." Wendy said, "Israeli soldiers are hot though. I would bang Israeli soldiers, if I could."

The yuppies sipped their IPAs in silence, too pompous to validate Wendy's claim, yet too intimidated by her brash confidence to do anything more than stare down at their Samsung screens.

Finally, a stubby Indian man in a *Google* t-shirt broke the silence.

"The internal camera on the new Galaxy is totally killer."

Wendy interjected -- "Dude, honestly, fuck anything thats not an iPhone. You don't want that green text. That's ratchet shit."

I knew I'd made a lifelong friend. Wendy and I spent the next three days and nights together, doing outlaw shit. I recorded her story before I left Oklahoma. In a way, I am insecure about the fact that the only story I recorded from a woman on the road was from a sex worker, but this is no coincidence. The road is a very unsafe place for

To be a woman on the road requires twice the charisma and know-how of a man in the same position. Every woman I met was both armed and accompanied -- and even then; there weren't many.

RENEGADE
by Big Wendy

I grew up in a big house in this country town of about six thousand people called Guthrie, Oklahoma. We had about forty acres of land. When I hit puberty, at about twelve or thirteen, things started to change. I know that's how it is for most people, but me -- I just wanted to be *bad*. I didn't give a shit about having the white, middle class, moderate sort of perspective that my parents, grandparents, and everyone I knew had.

When I was eighteen, I started popping prescription pills - Lortab, Percocet, and all that. I was dating this gnarly dude from Oklahoma. He introduced me to heroin. He romanticized it a lot, and subsequently, so did I. I had no concept of its consequences. It's been a battle since then.

I want to shoot heroin and stare at your naked body, he texted me once. I remember thinking that was like, really romantic..like something pulled from a William S. Burroughs novel.

On my eighteenth birthday, I said to myself, *I'm going to be a stripper*, and within a few days, I became one. I was working at this really seedy club called The Red Dog. It was a honky tonk and a titty bar, if you know what that is. I was shooting dope in the bathroom and had some disgusting, abusive boyfriends. I fit every stereotype you can imagine as far as a strung out stripper goes. Of the girls in the club that I worked in, most were pimped out, had children, and had been to jail. I was only making $200 a night, if I was lucky.

One day, I overdosed. I flat-lined in a Walgreens bathroom and almost died. After I got out of the hospital I immediately used heroin again. I was just really *sad*, I guess. I wasn't brave enough to face the world or to face myself without a blanket of narcotics. Finally my parents sent me to treatment for nine months, to a prestigious center in Culver City.

I noticed this whole community of women in L.A. who were independent sex workers and proud of it. They were empowered. As treatment was ending, I was laying in bed, having some anxiety. I kept having this thought that drove me crazy--

I'm just a basic, regular prison. Nobody's ever gonna want me, I'm just this honky from Oklahoma. Where was I going to fit in? What are the options for women in LA? Sex work was it. It was the only option that gave me autonomy to make as much money as I wanted doing what I'm good at. *I'm not going back to Oklahoma,* I told myself.

Fresh out of rehab, I began working at a high-end strip club in LA. Several months into that, I was propositioned by my first customer and it went from there. I considered myself, as a pimp would say, a '*renegade.*' which means that I'm a girl who refuses to depend on daddy's pimping, and instead is like, 'no, I'm doing this alone.' But when I was a *baby* in L.A., his put me in a lot of unsafe situations that would have been completely avoidable. I just had to learn game the hard way.

For example, I had a client one time named Ralph. He was a rich movie executive. Mentally, he was completely unhinged. His thing was being super dominant and I'm submissive so we had chemistry. Unfortunately though, he was into some really weird shit and I had no idea what I was doing.

Go to the pet store. Get a leash and a collar, he texted me once.

So I did that. I met him in the valley, off Ventura Boulevard. He was paying me about five hundred bucks an hour. It seems like a lot, but now I realize I could have gotten more from him. He walked me through the streets on on all fours with a dog leash and collar on.

The walk ended at an underground sex club. It was a mass orgy in an an old creaky house that had been renovated into this dungeon. There were sex toys everywhere— black-painted walls, giant chairs and swings, metal boxes, and steel cages! I walk in, and there's 15 or 16 old naked men — big movie guys — all standing in a circle with their dicks in their hands, watching this young dude have sex with an *old* woman. Then I realized they'd *all* fucked this woman, raw .. completely raw .. no condom! It was fucking gross, man. These were career sex addict type people who just didn't care anymore.

Ralph had me undress and basically attached me to this wooden crucifix that was fixed in the center of the dungeon. It was really uncomfortable, because my wrists were chained and i was hanging off the ground. Totally scary, not sexy. Not the kind of domination I'm into. Also .. not what Ralph paid for!

All the old men fell to their knees and started worshiping me and begging Ralph to touch me.

"Can i touch her, master?" they'd say.

"Put on gloves, and you may touch her," Ralph would say, then handed them a single black latex glove and let them touch me for five seconds each.

So that was really fucking weird.

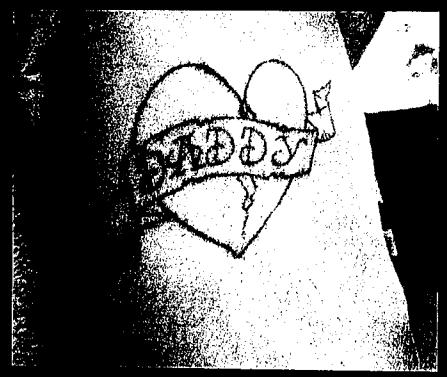
But here's some game I learned: if the client has paid you and you don't make your boundaries clear, you can't really say "no" to anything. And even if you want to, it's hard, especially if you're a renegade. It's also so common for sex workers and all women; to 'freeze up.' That doesn't make you timid or weak. It's just a normal thing that happens to women who have undergone trauma. There's stories upon stories upon stories of these gnarly, traumatizing expeiences, but I can say now they've ultimately made me a better person. I had to learn game the hard way.
Pro tip: avoid agency. Also, you don't need a man for protection.That's why I got a gun and learned how to use it.

So I was sober, living off-the-grid in LA for a year, doing sex work. Dude .. I had been sober for a fucking year, doing so good, going to AA! One night, I decided I wanted to smoke weed. The next day, I'm injecting heroin. That started a serious drug bender-- three days straight of *no eating,* just crack and heroin. Soon, I started running out of money and had to work more. It started to feel like I had a pimp, but that pimp wasn't an external force, it was in my head, a little pimp named heroin. It got to the point that I was having sex just for drugs.

One day, I broke down and called my sister, like *dude, I need to come home.* Thankfully, my family flew me back. Most girls aren't lucky enough to have that privilege. I went back to Oklahoma just to repeat the whole treatment process again. Finally, I got sober and realized that I wanted to bring that renegade L.A. side of myself Oklahoma. Pretty soon after sobering up, I started the the business I currently run in Oklahoma City. It's fucking *rad.* I own and manage a happy-ending massage service that's completely under the table. I currently have six girls working under me. Some of them do full service, but its mostly just massage and happy ending. I did this using a business model that's really popular in

billing. Then, I set up shop and advertised on *BackPage.* It's nice to go to work for 45 minutes a day and walk out with $300. I've never made anything less than $200 an hour. My sex work now is now at a capacity wherein I truly feel comfortable and empowered. I'm using the money to pay my tuition at the University of Oklahoma, where I'm just a year from earning my English degree. I want to be a journalist, but I'm gonna continue to build my empire and continue to do sex work along the way. In fact, I'm gonna do this shit til the wheels fall off! I mean, *probably.* Sex work is a great remedy to joblessness and I can do it on the side of anything. It adds value to my life. I just can't talk to people about it because what I do is completely underground. It's funny. Despite all the punks and anarchists -- or whatever -- in Oklahoma City who claim to be so anti-establishment, me and my girls are the only ones who are actually really doing something that goes completely under the government. We don't pay fucking taxes! We don't do shit. It's completely off the books, and we make anything from one to three grand a week, *each.* We are completely supporting ourselves and living awesome lifestyles while getting over on the government and it's system of patriarchy.

That's kind of kind of cool, right?



CHAPTER 3

runaways

lil freddie king
new orleans

a musician who at 13, hopped a one-way freight train bound for New Orleans,where he'd go on to become a Blues legend and international star.

49-51

nick cammarata
michigan

a high school hockey star who suffered a manic episode that sent him hitchhiking to Los Angeles, where he'd be a homeless rapper until being discovered by

king david
new orleans

a public insult comic who chose homelessness due to a midlife crisis that began after his sons went off to college

LITTLE FREDDIE KING

new orleans

SKINNED ALIVE

a train-hopping story told by Lil Freddie King

In the late 1950s, at just 14, I first set sight on New Orleans, I went to Libby Rosemoor High School in the Delta. It started with a [field trip] down to King Solomon's Church. All us school kids came down on the school bus to a big picnic. When I got down here, it blew my mind. *This place is what's happening!,* I thought to myself. Everything was poppin'. Everything was ballin', and everything is so convenient--its right on your mouth. I knew this was the place for me.

So, I went back to my house in McComb.

asked me.

"I didn't enjoy it. I loved it," I said, "New Orleans is where I need to be and I'm moving down there."

"Boy, don't you *never* say anything like that again. If you say something like that again, I'll skin you alive, boy," she said.

"Ok, then, mama .. if you don't want me to go, I won't go."

She was working for a doctor in McComb, and that next evening she came back from work and saw me.

"You still here? So I *don't* have to skin you alive," she said, "I know you, boy, because I had you! Once you get something in your head, you wind up doing it. Just know that when you do it, I'm still gonna skin you alive."

That night, I got to thinking about my Dad. He used to hobo the train around Mississippi and Louisiana for work. So I got it in my head to hobo the train. At around 3:30 the next morning, this train was coming through. I used to call it *Big Black*, it had smoke coming out the top of it. I grabbed my bag--a little white flowersack. I had a pair of pants, and a pair of shoes, and a shirt.

I looked around my house to make sure Mama was gone, then I ran on the west side of the tracks and laid down. The train had some open box cars, so I latched on to one of them. I was so small and little, I couldn't have weighed 90 pounds. When I got in the box car, I was flopping like a kite!

I didn't wanna fool around and go to jail. The first stop was Magnolia Box Company. I thought they were for sure gonna' get me. But in my box car, there was cardboard boxes in the corner. I hid underneath them. The policeman and conductor

searched the car and didn't find me. I knew I was getting closer to Louisiana.

My sister lived in New Orleans. She told me to jump off when the train passed Booker T Washington High School, because her house is three blocks from there, on Magnolia Street.

There it was! I bailed off! When I hit the ground, I was spinning like a spinning top. Man, I don't know how far I spun and rolled. I tore the *skin* off my arms and knees, and tore all the clothes off me. When I got up, I was right there. I was at Booker T Washington High School! Sure enough, I walked three blocks and there was Magnolia Street.

So I was standing there, and I couldn't find my sister's house. The houses were all painted the same color: battleship gray, and I didn't know her address

If I stand in one place, maybe I'll get shot, I thought, so I started walking around.

"Hey boy, what you doing there, come here!" a policeman said, "We've been watching you for a long time walking back-and-forth. What you doing, boy? You trying to rob somebody, or break into someone's house, or steal something?"

"I've never stole anything in my life and I'm not gonna steal nothing. I'm from McComb, Mississippi." I

So I walked over to the next street, then walked around all night. When daylight came, I got me a banana split at the Dairy Queen.

There was a guy opening his gas station nearby, a big guy.

"How you doing sir?" I asked him.

"Come here a minute," he told me, "You aren't from here, is you son?"

"I'm from McComb," I said.

"Oh you from Mississippi? Then we homeboys! Come back tomorrow at 8 a.m. And I'll give you a job."

So I came back. I ended up working with him for the next four years.

After my first day of work, the same policeman spotted me on Magnolia Street looking for my sister.

"Boy get in the car!" he yelled.

I got in the car and I told him the name of my siblings. I told him that my sister worked at Tulane University and that my brother-in-law worked off the docks on a banana boat.

"OK. Were gonna wait here. If one of your siblings doesn't show up *tonight,* I'm taking you to jail," the policeman said.

Sure enough, there comes my sister, with her Tulane uniform on.

"What you doing with my brother?" she asked the officer. The policeman let me free. I was so proud that my big sister showed up.

Some time after, I started playing the blues, and just kept going, and took off.

One day [a few years later] we were playing at the New Orleans. When we got there, on stage was the legend Lightnin Hopkins. After he got down off the stage, it was my turn. I was so nervous. After I finished my set, my buddy Mike ran up to me.

"Your cousin wants to talk to you," Mike said.

"What cousin you talkin bout? I got a million cousins."

"Your cousin, Lightnin Hopkins!" he said.

I didn't even know Lightnin, but I liked his music, and liked him. I didn't think we were related, I wasn't kin to him, but I went back and see him anyway.

"Damn, took you so long! You actin' like you didn't wanna see your cousin! You act like you ain't even related to me," Lightnin said.

I told him I loved the way he played and sang.

"Well, you're my little cousin," he said.

I didn't believe him until he told me the names of my family members. He knew the name of my father, Jesse. He knew my grandfather's name, too. I was just looking at him for a while, and it started to ring a bell.

He told me he was from thirty miles east of McComb, where I went to school at.

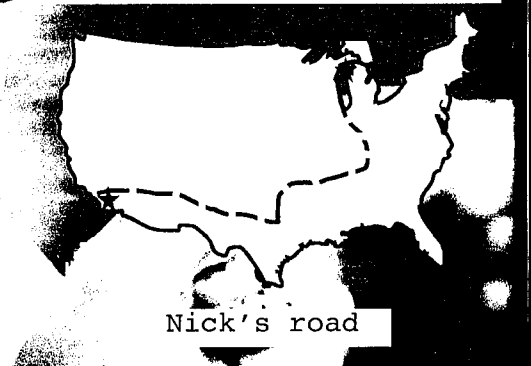
"Yo mama and my mama was sisters!" he said. He sure knew my people. Me and him wound up being second cousins! I grabbed him and hugged him, and didn't want to turn him loose! I was so proud and happy.

Little Freddie and Lightnin' went on to take the nation and world by storm, touring the world with artists like Bo Diddley. To this day, King plays shows in the New Orleans area nearly every week, often at the D.B.A on Frenchmen Street or Old Arabi Bar in Arabi. His music and live performance schedule

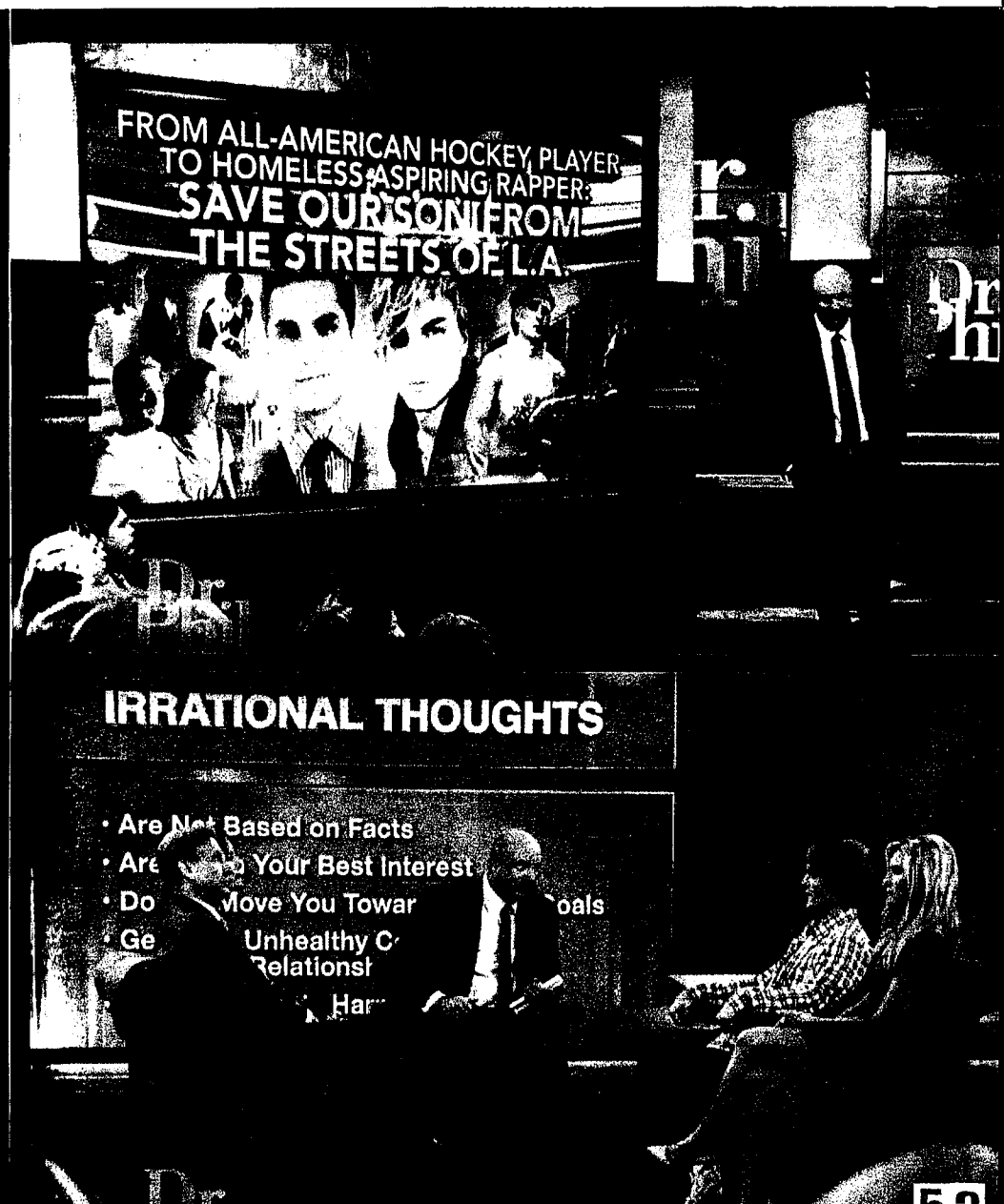
NICK CAMMARATA

Marquette, MI

I met Nick at the greyhound station in Albuquerque. He was with his best friend John. Nick immediately told me he'd was on his way to Los Angeles, to become a famous rapper, philanthropist, and visionary. We later linked up in Santa Monica and lived on the streets together for a few days. We worked out, went to a few strange bondage clubs, and stopped a hooligan from setting a homeless man on fire. Honestly, after I left LA I never expected to hear from Nick again. A year later though, I stumbled upon a viral video on Dr. Phil's channel titled *"From Hockey Star to Homeless Rapper,'* with over 500,000 views. Sure enough, it was my boy Nick in a shouting match with Dr. Phil accompanied by his crying family. Nick was a key character in my journey, so I reached out to him and recorded his story for this book.



Nick's road


FROM ALL-AMERICAN HOCKEY PLAYER TO HOMELESS ASPIRING RAPPER:
SAVE OUR SON FROM THE STREETS OF L.A.
IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS
• Are N Based on Facts
• Are Your Best Interest
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SENT MYSELF TO HELL

told by Nick Cammarata

I grew up in Marquette, at the top of Michigan. Back then, I was a hockey star. I came from a bourgeoisie family. My father was a pastor. I grew up with a silver spoon in my mouth. Right out of high school, when I was 18, I trained for the United States Special Forces, for pararescue in the Air Force; the hardest job in the U.S. Military. That job has a higher attrition rate than the Spuds or Navy Seals. Only 10% will make it through training, but I did. *I made it.* But after training, I had an epiphany. I realized I went through *hell* to do this amazing thing that almost nobody in the world can do, yet I was unhappy, insecure, and I hated myself. The only reason I was in training was to impress my dad. He was so hard on me .. like when you beat a dog so brutally, all it wants to do is be loyal to you. If I ever stepped out of line, he fucked me up.

I slipped into a deep depression. I a visited military psychiatrist; they said it was a manifestation of bipolar disorder. I was immediately discharged from the Special Forces. I spent the next four months back in Marquette in-and-out of the psych ward. I was on the verge of suicide. I thought dying was the only answer. I thought it would release all this tension, insecurity, pain, and unknowingness. I started going to school at University of Northern Michigan, as a pre-medical student. I was on the 'adderall wheel,' lets call it,' for a year. I was getting straight A's, being mentored by neurosurgeon, and working in a prestigious hospital as a medical assistant. I was perfectly on track to lead a successful life. But when my semester ended, I realized, again, *wow, I'm unhappy.* I needed to be *free* . . nothing pleased me. I had another depressive episode, but this time, far more torturous. To cope, I began experimenting with psychedelics and spirituality. Psilocybin, the active component in mushrooms, gave me the most profound, perfect experience I've ever had. I was so in-tune, happy and spiritual -- an ineffable outpour of *love.* I felt limitless and realized i could accomplish anything. That's where it all started, and *ended.* I decided I wanted to do something that would make everyone I know in my life turn their backs on me, laugh, and shun me. First, I stopped going to all of my jobs. I started waking up every day at 7 a.m. and walking five miles along Lake Superior by myself, with no phone, no headphones-- completely immersed, vibing with myself. My mind would go blank. I'd absorb nature. It was my daily meditation. I also started noticing all this bullshit happening in the world and wanted to relate to people who had nothing, so I started hanging out with these rough-and-tumble neighborhood kids--mostly sixteen year olds. A couple were on house arrest. I started playing video games with these kids, every day. I had them over to my apartment, which was a safe place for them to chill out to because their home lives were rough. I was a positive mentor in their lives. We started rapping together, and I progressed into writing and freestyling. Bumping A$AP Rocky instrumentals and ripping bowls -- thats what we did. My buddy John was one of those rough-and-tumble kids. He was an outcast. He was rough around the edges, but that's why liked him.

One night, John and I were reading a lot about 9/11, and the connection between the Bush and Bin Laden family. It freaked me out how deep the corruption ran.

all, which is a lot to snort at one time. When you do high amounts of amphetamines, you get delusional. I think I overdosed on amphetamines. I was surfing the dark web, and started reading redacted NSA documents. For whatever reason, I thought the CIA was *after me.* I truly believed they wanted to kill me, so I smashed my phone to pieces, covered up my laptop webcam, cut up all of my IDs and credit cards and made John do the same. I began crying uncontrollably.

"We have to go," I told him.

I filled up my backpack with a blue Neff hoodie, a bottle of water, fifteen wellbutrin and two t-shirts, and we left Marquette. We started walking on the highway and kept going. The first night, we walked *thirty miles* before we got out first ride. We got dropped off at a mall in Ann Arbor. It was the end of the semester for University of Michigan students, so the first day, we covered a lot of ground just getting picked up by cute college girls. The fact that I did what I did my friends didn't believe it. *Why the fuck did you do this? Why did you leave all that*? they'd ask me. And I get it .. I had a fast car, a beautiful home. But I value *experience. Yes,* money can give you power, but I want to get it on my own, then use it to spit in the *norm's* face! I figured I'd start by doing something so extreme that I could say, look, *I've gone there, I've gone to that hell, you can't fucking tell me anything.* If I could understand hell, I could understand how to show love. It took us three days to hitchhike to Texas. A trucker finally gave us a ride from Michigan to Amarillo. One night, he got us a room at the Motel 6. Before I went to bed, I had a vague sensation that something evil was going to happen. I couldn't shake it. That night, I woke up, and he was sitting on the edge of my bed, staring at me in the dark.

"Hey, what the fuck are you doing?" I blurted. I scared him. He jumped.

"Oh sorry man, I couldn't sleep," he said. Then his silhouette lowered and he went to sleep. I was so weirded out. I got up and sat in the computer room for the rest of the night, just Facebooking my friends. The next morning, we ate breakfast and hit the road, heading west from Amarillo, to New Mexico. In the

"Remember last night?" he said, "I have to confess something. I am a homosexual. I want sex from you. I'm into dudes your age .. and you're hot."

"Sorry man, I'm not into that," I told him, real respectfully. But he demanded sexual favors in order to ride any further. He had an MBA from UCLA, really interesting guy, I got to know him really well. It was a shame that he ruined it. The next day, I called my Mom and told her what I had done. She wasn't even that upset! "If this is something you think you need to do son, go do it," she said. I had her wire me $500 and caught the bus from Amarillo to Albuquerque, where I met *you*, and then I went to to LA. After you left LA, I was homeless in Los Angeles for five months-- completely homeless. But I would not take all the money in the fucking world to replace that experience. I walked halfway across the country, bussed the rest of the way, then lived off nothing for five months. I took it to the most extreme place I could go. I put myself there.

The first time i walked through LA, it through Skid Row. I was like, *wow, this fucking sucks. This place is a shithole.* But then we hopped on the metro bus and went to Panorama City, into the valley, and I read the topography. The city started to wrap itself around my soul. That whole summer, I lived off nothing in Santa Monica, just working on my hip-hop and living in-and-out of homeless shelters. Santa Monica is the city I fell in love with, and where I experienced the most suffering, bliss, and joy. I experienced a whole lifetime in four months. Every night on the beach, I learned something new and found a dope ass jacket. I'd walk around LA all night with the jacket, and get into nightclubs just because I had the *sick* jacket that nobody had. All the memories are hazy now. Every day, I was so high from adrenaline. Every day was life or death. Almost every night, I slept in the parking garage of an Old Folks home. I'd walk in through the lobby, like I was visiting my grandmother, then slip into the janitor's closet, grab a stack of blue hospital blankets, then make a bed out of them and crash in the corner of the garage. Then I made friends

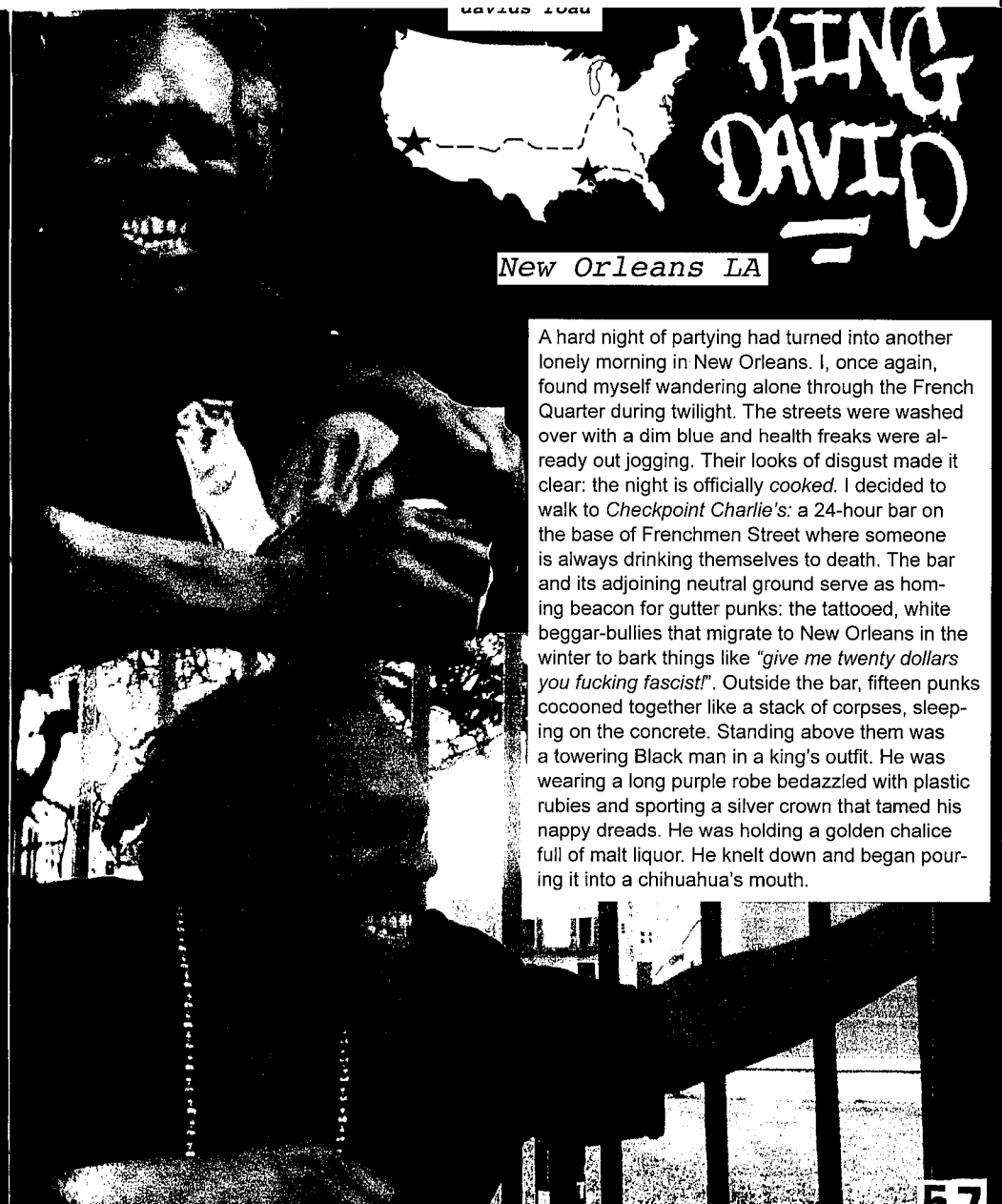
and started bouncing around with random people. I met this kid from Koreatown, I stayed with him for a week. I met this meth dealer, who let me crash at his crib for three weeks. But there were so many moments of suffering.

I've never told anyone this, bro-- one night, I passed out on the sidewalk in Venice. Fuck, I don't know what time it was. I woke up and my pants were down around my ankles and this two dudes -- these junkies -- were pulling down my boxers and reaching for my dick. They were trying to rape me. I pulled my feet out of my sleeping bag and threw my pants off. I've been in muy tai for three or four years, so I'm *relatively* dangerous. I fucked these two dudes up! They were so scrawny. I threw them down and wailed on them. Then I got up, grabbed my pants and walked away sobbing. That rattled me to my core. It showed me how fucked up people can be. I couldn't believe that someone could disrespect my spirit that much. They looked at me like an object. Before then, I had some innocence. But after, it was gone. After that, I wasn't able to fall asleep. I stayed up for days on end. I started going to a mental health facility for homeless youth called *Daniel's Place* that served me food and gave me dope clothing. I saw a therapist for five weeks, until he came on to me in a therapy session. He touched my leg and I threw him across the room, screaming "fuck you!". After that, they kicked *me* out, yet *didn't* fire the scumbag therapist. I had no place to eat. Then began my '*hell month*,' I call it. I was stealing from every gas station I could come across, and probably ate one meal every two days. I once went three days with no food . . but after three days, you just stop being hungry and go into starvation mode. I'll be honest-- I did a lot of meth that month because It helped me fall asleep.

Speeding, speeding speeding, mental breakdowns, calling my mom crying. I needed to be in a hospital, I shouldn't have been in the street. I was rattled, pissed, homicidal, so much rage at those two rapist crackheads and at my therapist who I trusted. There were five or six fights that summer too. I just kept fighting. Its all a druggy blur. I know that I spent my 21st birthday passed out in a parking garage .. that's a moment are that motivates me so much, man. It makes me want to uplift myself and everyone else. That's when I realized; I'm either going to be that dude who spent his 21st in a parking garage, OR i'm gonna be that dude who spent his 21st in a parking garage and is a multi-millionaire who does good with is money, a renegade who inspires people, gives away 90% of his profits and says *fuck you* to the *norm.*

Thank god, my parents finally flew out to LA, and were like, *yo, wanna go on Dr. Phil?* That was my chance! You see, I want to be an artist, a rapper, an entertainer, and everything else. I want to inspire everyone with my story. I want to pour myself out. I want people to see me and appreciate it. I'm a talented person. I know it. I have skills. I have passion. I just need to put it together. So I told Dr. Phil: *I'll go on, if I can promote my music.* So I went on Dr. Phil with my family and talked about my whole life. I've never watched it, but I know it has close to a half a million views, and I know that it was the end of my homelessness. After that, my parents took me back to Michigan.

My experience as a whole gave me the pain - the pain needed to have confidence. Despair builds confidence. Suffering builds character. Being homeless made me a stronger individual. I have less malice than I did before. I'm not a strong man yet .. but I'm getting there. I have experienced the meek, bizarre fucked up shit that I can turn around into a positive message and inspire motherfuckers. *Was it worth it?* .. Well .. thats to be determined. Thats based on how much discipline I can bring into my *new life.* I know I'm not going to fall of the wagon again. I'm determined and confident. As of today, I'm living back in Los Angeles in a nice apartment. My place has no electricity or hot water but I'm in heaven. Soon, Im going up to San Francisco to finish my EP with a producer and sound engineer. We're going to sit down and get creative. I need to have it done before my next Dr. Phil appearance. I have a sequel coming up. I'm going to do something crazy. I'm going to go on Dr Phil with music, and go viral.



A hard night of partying had turned into another lonely morning in New Orleans. I, once again, found myself wandering alone through the French Quarter during twilight. The streets were washed over with a dim blue and health freaks were already out jogging. Their looks of disgust made it clear: the night is officially *cooked.* I decided to walk to *Checkpoint Charlie's:* a 24-hour bar on the base of Frenchmen Street where someone is always drinking themselves to death. The bar and its adjoining neutral ground serve as homing beacon for gutter punks: the tattooed, white beggar-bullies that migrate to New Orleans in the winter to bark things like *"give me twenty dollars you fucking fascist!"*. Outside the bar, fifteen punks cocooned together like a stack of corpses, sleeping on the concrete. Standing above them was a towering Black man in a king's outfit. He was wearing a long purple robe bedazzled with plastic rubies and sporting a silver crown that tamed his nappy dreads. He was holding a golden chalice full of malt liquor. He knelt down and began pouring it into a chihuahua's mouth.

I saw a chance for a picture, so I stopped and reached for my phone.

"Aye, whattup though? I know what you are thinking," he said, "but dog food ain't cheap, and Yoda's already dumb as fuck. You want him to starve, don't you?"

Before I could respond, he laughed—or, rather; scrunched his face as if imploding, culled like a bird caller, clapped furiously and made a hyena's smile.

"Fair enough," I said.

On his robe, written in metallic glitter was *KING DAVID.*

"So why do they call you King *David*?" I asked him.

"Well, my mama called me two things. King David and *dumb as fuck. So* you decide."

He laughed again, but even louder, awakening one of the gutter punks. The scab-covered punk leapt up and posed like karate fighter, but was immediately pacified by the sight of his king.

"King," he muttered, then made a slight bow.

"*Fuck you whitey*!" David yelled. The punk glanced at his own hands in shock, as if discovering *holy shit, I am a white person*, and then collapsed back into his friends, snoozing instantly.

I ended up spending the next week hanging on the street with David, drinking vodka and talking about his life. I was never bored. This is because david's charisma is endurant. Rain or shine; he spends every waking moment playfully roasting complete strangers, with no care for whether they acknowledge him or not. Still, I found myself caught in a dilemma. How could I capture his existence without being crude or exploitative? *Edgy* documentarians and film photographers have long exhausted the hipster fetish for the black, homeless, and tattooed. I figured I'd start by earning David's respect. That involved sleeping in his makeshift camp, racking food, and showing him that I was willing to put hearts I had with David during that week. To this this day, every time he sees me, he stops me in my tracks, hugs me, and tells me: "I love you man." I *love* David too, as do many others. In fact, everyone in-and-around Frenchmen Street seems to *love* him. High-paid bartenders will often stop, sit down with him and chat for a while. Locals are constantly posing for photos. One woman on Royal Street sells oil paintings of him and his dog for $45. King David is a permanent fixture of Frenchmen and is as much a part of its ecosystem as are its jazz clubs, art market, tattoo parlors, and pop-up brass band. Yet his origins are mysterious. No one is quite sure *who* he is or *how* he got there, yet they can count on him to appear prophetically on the front curb outside of Vaso -- a popular jazz club -- around 7 p.m. each night, where he holds up his signature cardboard sign: "**Insults: One Dollar.**" Most of David's customers are insecure men--balding, muffin-topped drunkards who want their ugliness validated. The others are usually *macho* men with women around them who want to prove their verbal invincibility.

One night, I was sitting on the curb with David during his shift, and a buff young kid in an Alabama State sweatshirt walked up to us, shadowed by a grimacing flock of college girls. He threw a dollar down at David.

"Give it your best shot. I want you to roast me alive," he said. David stood up, got an inch from the kid's face and looked him square in his eyes.

"You are smart. You are strong. You are beautiful. You are kind. You are intelligent. You are powerful .. and I love you," David said.

The kid was in shock, but I was not. David gives this same response every single time.

"*That's .. that's* my insult?" the kid asked.

David leaned in and hugged him, then whispered something into his ear, which I was barely close enough to hear---

DAVID'S STORY

**this story is transcribed from a variety of consensually recorded interviews, the contents of which which were approved for release by David*

**I have decided to censor the use of the n-word in the following transcription because though they are not my words, I am the one projecting them to you.*

David's Story

I went to school with all these little white kids and shit, and we were playing tag . . I was it.

"The n****s it, the n****s it!" they'd yell, and I'd chase them up down the street, you know. That's the first time I heard that fucking *word*, man.

This little dude Greg, right . . he was so scared that he ran into his house, yelling to his Mom and Dad -- "*The n****s coming! The n****s coming*!"

So I ran up into Greg's house. His parents were so terrified and shit.

So I grabbed Greg, tagged him and yelled "Ha! *You're the n**** now*!"

"Sit down, we have to have a talk," my Mom said. "Your daddy is gone."

"Well where'd he go?" I asked

"He's on *vacation*," she said.

"Well that don't sound so bad, how long is he gonna be on vacation?"

"Five to ten."

"Alrighty mom!"

I came home from school one day -- probably a week later -- and there was a U-Haul in the driveway.

"Mother, I'm home!" I said. That's how you talk when you're from the suburbs, you know?-- "Why is there a U-haul? Are we moving?"

"Why would i get a U-Haul if we aren't moving? You dumb as fuck. Get your shit."

All the white men up and down the block come out of their houses. They're rushing to load the U-Haul, pushing me out of the way and shit.

"Mother, they love us!" I said.

"Shut up."

They got *everything!* The white men got everything out of our house. One dude gave us full gas money. The other dude goes: "do you need any directions?"

"Fuck you, *whitey*," my Mom said to him.

"Mother, how can you say that?" I said, "they love us!"

That's where I get that from, my phrase: *fuck whitey.*

As we left, man, these white people are barbecuing, basically having ticker-tape parades and shit. They were so happy the n****s were leaving it was ridiculous. Meanwhile, I'm just sitting in the truck bouncing up and down like '*they love us!*." But they don't love us.

So we had to leave the suburbs and go to the hood. That's when everything went downhill. Everything started spiraling. My first day in the hood was a little traumatic.

I'm walking down the street, I hit at the corner and three little brothers pull up, like "what up n****?"

I'm like, "hey guys, how y'all doing!", *real* suburb-like.

They're like, "where the fuck you *from* bruh?"

"Oh! I just got here from Sherman Oa--". -- p*ow! bang! kick! boom! gold teeth! nike swoosh! stars!*

I get up and I'm crying, asking "why'd ya'll do that?"

They're like, "you're talking like you white man, *talk right*!"

I'm thinking-- *talk right*? .. Then again--*pow, bang, kick, boom*--same thing.

So I get up again, they're like, "what you gotta say *now*?"

"Good lookin' out my n**** y'all got my all da way together. I was trippin' for a minute, fasho, but i'm straight now," I said. Then I dapped them up.

Soon, I knew the handshakes and everything bruh. I got the black kicked in me.

I was walking past the Barber Shop and old-timer said to me, "what's up young brother?"

I'm from the suburbs, so I was nervous, so I look at him and I go *"fuck whitey!"* like my mama used to say.

Everyone freaked out, they were like- "I like *this* youngin! He's gonna be somebody. He's gonna be the next president!"

Then at school, I saw a rap cypher happening outside. I never saw no parts of this! *Everybody* is rapping, and since Im Black now, I know all the slang.

The circle comes around and it's my turn. All these older heads are yelling at me, like "come on lil n**** spit bars, say *something!*".

I pause for a few seconds.

"Fuck whitey!"

Just like that, I became the illest MC on the planet.

And the OG from the neighborhood . . when he shot dice, he'd put it in my hand --- *come on lil David wit ya bad ass, uhh*! -- and I'd roll for him. One day he put some money and my pocket and said *get on with it*

One day I got home, I dapped up my peoples and set up my house as a spot. My mom just was sitting

She looks at me and says, "*who's the n**** now*?"

I miss my mama.

Over time, I became the man. I had the money, I had the car, I had all that shit, and of course, girlfriends. By the way, I said *girlfriends*, plural. I was running about being a whore. But my problem was; I had a hard time being in stable relationships. It's all because of my mama, she always used to say, *they ain't shit, just hoes and tricks.*

There were three girls and I ended up having kids with the third lady. I don't wanna say her name, but we raised two boys together. But before then, I had a daughter named *Kayla Marie.* I didn't get the privilege of raising her, but her mother had the *nerve* to marry a dude named David! Kayla is smarter than me by a hundred and fifty. She's the most beautiful girl in the world . . the most *beautiful girl* in the world! People always ask me, how did you get them kids? I got three kids by two different white women, my

n****, top *that!*

I remember when they were growing up. I remember playing tag, I remember running in the streets and when they were teenagers. I remember all that shit, you know? They might have kids right now, I don't even know man. I'm the worst daddy ever. But I only have eighteen years right? That was my responsibility. After that .. *fuck y'all*.. but they go by quick . . they go by so quick.

They went by so quick it was ridiculous. I remember teaching them how to color, and keep it in the lines. I remember teaching them how to write their names and tie their shoe strings. I remember teaching my son how to fuck. I said *bruh, take ya' dick out, put it in the pussy and don't stop.* That was probably bad advice, but I remember telling him that man...he was like seven.

But once the kids was raised, I didn't have shit else to do. I pulled up at the crib and it looked like an abandoned building. *I was like, I'm not going in there!* I can see all their shit on the walls .. everything, it was still the same, but they're *gone.* They're off in college, or wherever.

So I called my cousin, he fucking took me to Greyhound, and I hit the *road*, man. From there, that's a long story. A lot of years, a lot of walking, a lot of aggravation, a lot of patience, and a smart dog .. who won't stop drinking my vodka! I hit about six different states, finally got here eventually. I went to Cincinnati, Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, all through Florida, and now I'm in New Orleans. .

I've been on the streets for five, six years now. I was forty four when I left home. I was a grown ass man.

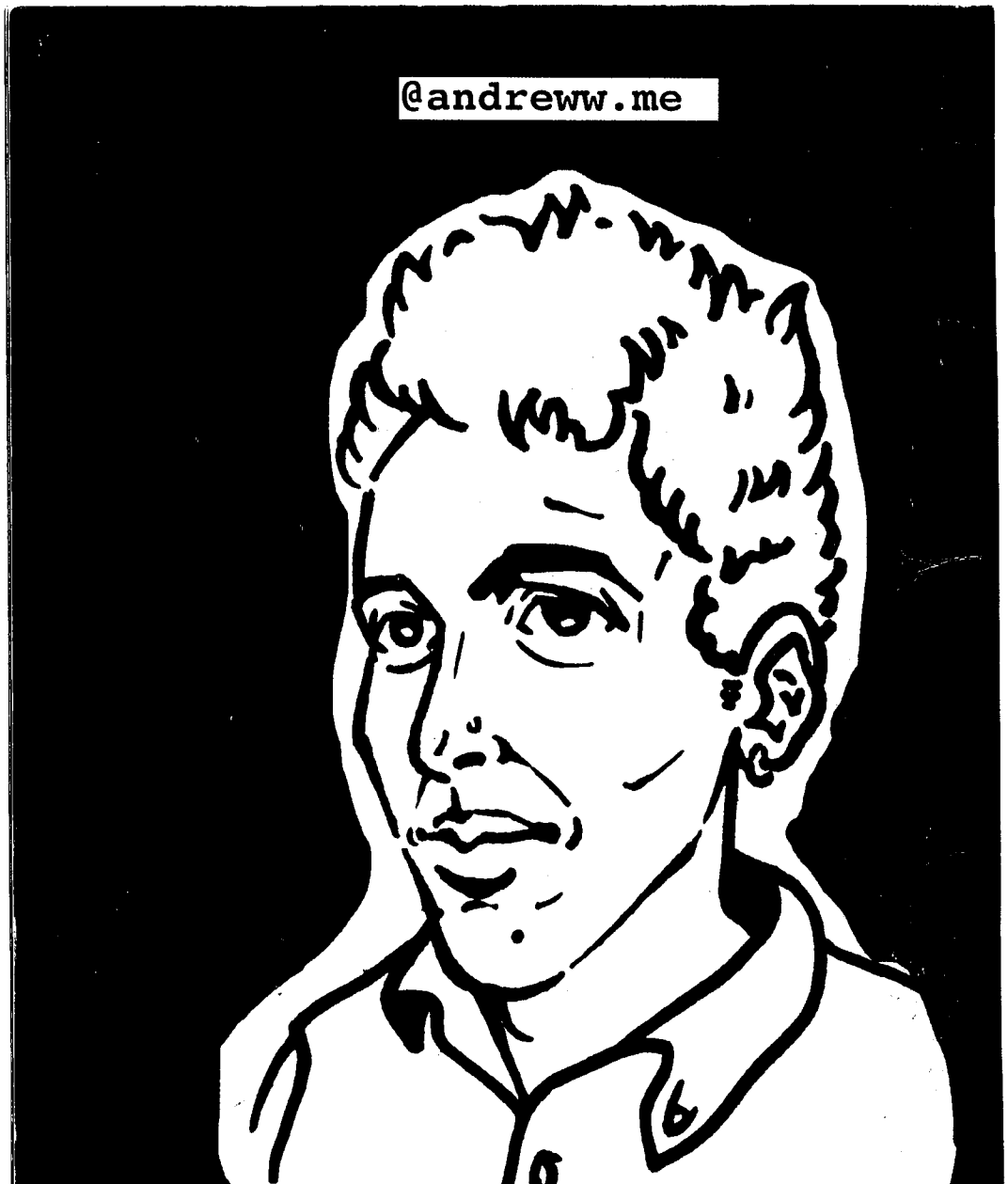
I guess .. I just grew up, and I said to myself, *I want to be young again.* That's why I hit the streets, man. I wanted to be young again. Now

Im *fifty!* It didn't work. I am fifty as fuck! I am not young, I'm old as fuck. Still, I think the streets chose me though. There's a lot of people out in the streets who can't even do it .. can't keep up two or three days, you know what I mean? I think the streets choose *you,* man. This is concrete. It's not gonna move, its not gonna budge, nothing is gonna change. Either you change, you adapt, or you kick rocks. I've already raised kids. I've been in a house. I had that shit. It was nice .. it was nice to be able to go and get in some hot water, I will admit that. But right now, I'd rather be on the street, with these pretty girls. But I was the best daddy ever. I'm compassionate. I loved on my kids. They're the smartest motherfucking kids you've ever seen in your life. Everybody always says, *how did you get them kids?* But I haven't talked to my kids in forever man .. and *fuck* em. If they found me, they would show up, they would throw me on the ground, tie my hands up and take me back somewhere I don't want to be. That's why I'm trying to be anonymous. But I miss them to death you know . . Hey, but I've got a new kid .. Yoda, my dog. He triggers my paternal instincts.

Plus I just took some acid and its just now kicking in. It feels good, too .. warm .. *tenderoni.*

I have a *do not return* in three states. I've been to jail so many times since I left I cant even count. But I'm fifty years old today .. and I'm thinking about Kayla Marie, the most beautiful girl in the world. I haven't been there for her . .

Sorry .. I'm sorry . . all i can do is say sorry.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